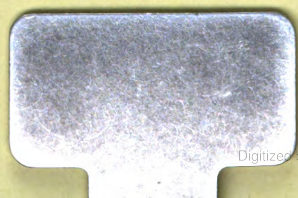

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DARK ROSALEEN.

DARK ROSALEEN.

BY

MRS. O'SHEA DILLON.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

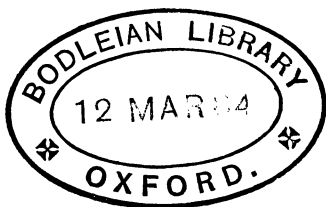
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CHARLES DICKENS AND EVANS,
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Part IV.—The Secret.

(Continued.)

DARK ROSALEEN.

CHAPTER II.

THE DAGGER AGAIN.

BRIDE KILLEEN and Peter O'Brady strolled leisurely across the fields on their way back from visiting Mrs. Fogarty of Baltore. The young girl was restless, and would fain have quickened her companion's dilatory steps, but he, noticing her impatience, lingered and dawdled purposely.

Notwithstanding his recent defeat, the editor of *The Avenger* was more careless and light-hearted than ever, and with unconquered vivacity he threw himself into various attitudes, picturesque and otherwise, as he gave Bride a dramatic description of one of his electioneering adventures.

When they reached the meadow which skirted the lawn of the chapel-house, they were met by Sall-o'-the-Wig.

"Why, Sally," cried the girl, "what brings you out here? You promised me faithfully that you would remain at home with uncle until we should return."

"Arrah, miss, Father John sint me out av sivil arrands."

"You should not have left him under any circumstances," said the young girl in a vexed tone.

"Faix, alanna, where's the good av botherin' yerself for nothin'? The masther, God bless him, is sure to be all roight. He said he'd lie down and have a nap on the sofy."

Bride hurried forward with a presentiment of coming evil, and the contagion of her uneasiness communicated itself to O'Brady and Sally, for they silently hastened after her. As she neared the chapel-house, they were appalled by hearing the ominous cry of:

"Rosaleen! Rosaleen!"

With a glance of intelligence at each other, they sped across the intervening space, and burst into the parlour.

Kennedy, with eyes blazing with insanity, and

cruel claw-like fingers, was on the top of Hinson, and in the act of strangling him.

“ Oh God! another murder! another murder!” cried Bride Killeen, beside herself with fear.

O’Brady promptly flung himself on the mad priest, and dragged him by main force off the prostrate form of his victim.

Sall-o’-the-Wig put her bare red muscular arms underneath Hinson, and raised him to his feet.

Snatched from the confines of another world, the “master’s” subtle brain groped awhile as he supported himself against the sturdy breast of the peasant woman.

His small, delicate features were swollen out of shape, and his pink complexion was blurred with livid patches. Sall suddenly letting go her hold of him, he staggered blindly against the wall, and the priest, enraged at the prospect of losing his prey, sprang towards him, and clutched him again by the throat. With much difficulty, O’Brady succeeded in extricating the choking man, and then, holding Father John pinioned in his embrace, he motioned to Sally to take Hinson away. The woman half-pushed, half-pulled him out, and when the door closed

behind them, Bride turned the key in the lock and drew down the blind.

"Compose yourself, sir, compose yourself," said the editor, as he tried to impel the priest towards the sofa.

"Oh! Uncle John, do—do shed tears. It will take the weight off your poor brain," exclaimed the girl eagerly, as she clasped her hands with a movement of entreaty. "Peter, let us make him cry. Doctor Pinti said that tears would draw the blood from his head."

Kennedy gazed at both of them, and for a brief space a flash of reason came back to him, and he recognised O'Brady.

"Peter," he said, "Peter, help me, my brain is on fire."

"Don't be alarmed, sir," said the editor encouragingly. "You'll be yourself again shortly."

The sanguine speaker was hopeful all too soon, for the glare of insanity again lit up the priest's eyes. Freeing himself from the friendly hands which held him, he strode round the room, muttering threats of vengeance.

Like a panther in a narrow cage, he stamped angrily to and fro, seeking something or someone on whom to vent his rage.

"Space—space," he cried; "I want space."

The world is not large enough for me to breathe in. I stifle—I stifle.”

The two spectators looked on with infinite distress. This sad scene was nothing new to them. They had witnessed many such during the past three years, and each succeeding attack only proved to them, more and more, how helpless they were to relieve him of his burden of woe.

“Peter,” whispered Bride, “I can’t bear this any longer. It will kill him.”

“Never fear,” said the editor reassuringly; “the paroxysm will soon exhaust itself.”

“Oh, but I’m sure he suffers dreadfully,” persisted the girl. “Look at his face. It is awful! Oh Peter! do—do think of something to touch him and make him shed tears. It would be such a relief to his poor burning head.”

O’Brady ran his hands through his curls in search of an idea. It was easy for Bride to talk, but how was he to hit on a subject which, instead of aggravating Father John’s present unhappy state, might act as an electric shock on him and restore him to his senses?

He had it!

The death of Adam Glover! Surely that might produce the desired effect.

Kennedy the while never ceased his wild paces to and fro, knocking out of his way books, chairs, and every other obstacle which obstructed his path. In one of his turnings he came rather roughly in contact with the old-fashioned writing-desk belonging to his niece. Infuriated against the inanimate object, as if it were a responsible being, he lifted it up and dashed it on the floor with such force that the secret receptacle flew open and the Cuban dagger fell out with a clattering noise. The priest arrested his steps and gazed gloomily at the weapon.

This incident bore no particular significance to O'Brady, who was entirely absorbed in his plan for diverting the current of Kennedy's madness by rousing the pathetic in his nature.

"Sir," said he experimentally, "the late Rector and you were great friends. How you must miss him! Mr. Glover was so good and so gentle, the man who murdered him must have been a hard-hearted monster."

The priest stirred slightly at these words, and, without removing his dry eyes from the stained blade, which appeared to exercise a strange fascination over him, he murmured :

"Dead, dead—Adam dead!"

In the embrasure of the front window Bride Killeen stood, stricken with fright. When the dagger escaped from its hiding-place, she made a quick movement forwards, intending to pick it up and conceal it in the folds of her dress ; but when O'Brady at this very moment, by a fatal coincidence, mentioned the name of the murdered Rector, she was so startled that her limbs became paralysed, her hands fell helpless by her side, and her heart almost ceased to beat.

Father John had grown very quiet, and the editor, emboldened by this favourable symptom, went closer to him.

"Sir," said he, "see if you can't cry. It would do you a world of good. Think of poor Mr. Glover, how fond he was of you, and how sorry he would be if he were alive and saw you suffering in this way."

Kennedy stirred again and turned his head towards the speaker.

"Dead ! Adam—murdered !"

Then, like a branch shaken by the wind, the priest commenced to tremble, and O'Brady hastily placed a chair for him, into which he dropped, worn out by the ordeal through which he had passed. His chest heaved convulsively,

and in a few seconds—thrice blessed relief—the tears coursed down his rugged features.

“Thank God! Thank God!” fervently exclaimed the editor.

And as the tears flowed a gradual transformation took place in Kennedy’s appearance. Little by little the blood-shot eyes resumed their natural calmness, the seamed brow almost smoothened, the mouth, losing its painful contraction, regained all its sensitive mobility, and as the light of returning reason spread itself, the dire expression of agony disappeared and the priest’s face was illumined by its characteristic intelligence.

He gazed upwards at the editor of *The Avenger* with the air of one wakened from a bad nightmare, and he smiled in affectionate recognition of the care and attention which he divined must have surrounded him in his hour of trial. Then, as if memory still held snatches of the last words addressed to him, he said :

“Dead! dead! Adam gone! Rosaleen gone! Peter,” he added, “leave me before it is yet too late. To care or be cared for by John Kennedy is equally fatal. Abandon me while there is yet time.”

“Never, sir, never! Why, I’m prouder of

your friendship than of anything else I could possibly possess."

Whilst speaking, O'Brady pushed the matted, iron-gray locks back from the priest's forehead with more than a woman's tenderness, and affectionately watched the changes which passed over the marked countenance. A delirious confusion of ideas and images was still whirling through Kennedy's brain, and with indomitable strength of will he was striving to reduce the chaos to a certain order. At length he said in a low tone :

"I remember now. There was a struggle, and a fierce one. Who was the man, and did I hurt him?"

"Well now, if I were you I wouldn't bother——"

"I know," interrupted Father John, with a sudden light in his eyes; "it was James Hinson. He has had many a narrow escape at my hands," he added grimly, "ay, even when I have had my wits fully about me."

The exertion of speaking brought on a fit of coughing, the violence of which shook Kennedy's whole frame.

The anxious editor hurried to the door, calling loudly to Sally to fetch some water.

"Peter," gasped the priest, as soon as he recovered sufficient breath, "a few more attacks such as I have had to-day, and the old hulk will no longer be able to weather the storm."

O'Brady, who had returned and was supporting Kennedy, said cheerily :

"Nonsense, sir, don't talk like that. Doctor Pinti means to make a wonderful cure of you, and when you return from Italy you'll be lively as a three-year-old. Now, Sarah, quick ; give me the water. What a time you've been !"

"Whisht, avic, whisht," whispered the woman close to his ear. "Me ould aunt from Limerick is in a dreadful state, an' I'm attindin' to her and tryin' to get rid av her afore Jane comes back from town. How are ye now, sir ?" she added aloud, addressing Father John.

"Better, Sally."

"Arrah, thin," said Sall, in an injured voice, "ye won't ketch me lavin' ye all alone agin—no, not av ye wor to bate me an' turn me out. Sorra bit av me will lave ye unless Misther Pether or Miss Bride is wid ye. Lay back there now an' make yerself comfortable," she continued, as she arranged a pillow for the invalid to rest his head against.

"Thank you, Sally, but I prefer sitting straight. Take the pillow away."

The woman slipped behind the priest's chair, and putting her apron to her jaw, she began to rock to and fro as if in pain.

"Ochone, ochone, Father John, honey, I'm that bad with a toothache, would ye mind me havin' a dhrop av whisky?"

"Mind!" he exclaimed; "why do you ask such a question, Sally? You are welcome to everything in my house."

Sall grinned, and, going to the wine cupboard, took out a bottle of whisky. On her way to the door she had to pass Bride Killeen, and was thunderstruck at the strange aspect and fixed, unnatural pose of the young girl. The woman stared open-mouthed at Bride and crossed herself vigorously.

"Holy St. Bridget," she said, in an undertone, "what's the matther wid her now? Musha, iv I hadn't to attind to me ould aunt from Limerick, I'd soon find out."

Then hugging the bottle closely to her, she went to the kitchen. As her grotesque figure vanished, the priest said:

"Peter, did ever man have three such devoted friends as I? You, and Sally, and my dear

little girl. I hope the poor child wasn't much upset on my account. Bride, where are you? Come here."

There was no answer, and Father John's eyes wandered around the room, taking in the disorder created by himself, the broken desk and fallen dagger, and resting last of all on the form of his niece.

Pallid and terror-stricken, the girl shifted her regards alternately from her uncle to the fatal weapon, which she either could not or dare not reach out her hand even to touch.

When Kennedy had scrutinised her a moment, there came to him by an unaccountable flash of inspiration a glimmer of what was passing in her mind. His face grew cold and hard, and with his piercing eyes riveted upon her, he pointed towards the dagger as he asked the question :

"For what purpose has this been concealed, and what are these stains?"

There was an interval of silence—of intense surprise on the part of O'Brady, and of increased terror on the part of Bride.

"Will neither of you answer me?" said the priest, glancing from one to the other. "Why do you treat me as a child?" he continued. "I

was mad a little while since, 'tis true, but now I am in my perfect senses."

There was a plaintive bitterness in the tones with which these last words were uttered.

"Well, sir," said the bewildered editor, "I—I really know nothing at all about the matter."

Kennedy directed a suspicious regard at O'Brady, and then, rising, he advanced towards the girl. Resting one hand on the table, to steady himself, he pointed again to the dagger, and said :

"What does this mean?"

Bride cowered before the keen gaze, which seemed to read her inmost thought.

"Speak, girl, speak!" he said imperiously.

Then, as if forced by a will stronger than her own, she gasped out brokenly :

"The Pass of Kylenamanna—the Rector—oh God! uncle, don't—don't——"

"Go on."

"I—I found the dagger in his heart—oh God——"

She stopped and stretched out her hands, as if to ward off some dreadful sight.

"Go on," he repeated.

"I—I plucked it out before the soldiers came, and—and——"

"And you thought I was the murderer?"

O'Brady caught the priest by the arm, and said :

"Sir, sir, do not excite yourself!" But Kennedy motioned him to keep back.

The girl crouched to her knees on the ground, and joined her hands as if in prayer. Her uncle looked down on her, and, with a repellent frown and frigid manner, he said in a slow, metallic voice :

"You sat at the table daily with me. You spoke to me—nay, even you laughed with me—and all the while you let the foul thought fester within you that I, cold-blooded assassin, had murdered my dearest friend, and then had come home and made merry."

As he finished speaking he seemed to lose his firmness, and, with tremulous lips and faltering steps, returned to his chair. Seating himself, he leaned his elbows on the table, and buried his face in his hands.

When he raised his head again there was a wistful humility in the look which he bent on O'Brady.

"Peter," said he, "you, at least, never thought me capable of this vile deed? You never suspected that John Kennedy, even in his maddest hour, could take the life of Adam Glover?"

"Sir," said the editor, anxious to soften matters, "you mustn't excite yourself, or you will be ill. I wouldn't worry myself just now."

"Peter," continued the priest, "I swear to you that from the time Adam Glover left this house, on the day of his murder, I never laid eyes on him until I went to look at his corpse in the school-house. You believe me?"

"I do, sir—of course I do," was O'Brady's ready, emphatic answer; and then, wishing to distract Father John's attention, lest dwelling too long on such a melancholy subject might stimulate his brain and bring on a fresh attack, he added: "Put this aside entirely for the present, sir. We can talk it over to-morrow when you are rested. A quiet stroll will soothe your nerves. Let me take you out in the fields for a breath of fresh air. The atmosphere of this room is close and stifling."

So saying, he extended his hand to help Kennedy to rise.

Bride Killeen got off her knees, her face radiant with joy. The few straightforward words her uncle had spoken brought instant conviction to her, and chased away for ever the dreadful suspicion which had caused her so much heedless unhappiness. The day when in the Pass of Kylenamanna she came across the dead body of Adam Glover, with the Cuban dagger in his heart, there seemed to her only too much cause to believe that her uncle, in a fit of temporary insanity, had killed the Rector, but now she was surprised to think that she could have ever harboured such a belief. There was one feature in Father John's phase of brain trouble, which was, that when he recovered his senses he retained a recollection of all that was said and done during the period that his mind had been distraught, and except a partial disinclination to receive visitors and a decided reluctance to discuss the details of the tragedy, there had been nothing unusual in his manner after the Rector's death. Certainly nothing to indicate the possibility of his being haunted by an accusing memory connected with his murdered friend. And now that all this had been made clear, Bride marvelled at her own blindness.

"Forgive me, uncle, forgive me," said

she, as she approached him, beaming with smiles.

The priest, who had risen, and was leaning on O'Brady, looked at her coldly, and then waved her from him.

"Go," said he. "I will not soon forget your evil thought of me."

"Oh, uncle," she exclaimed sorrowfully, "do forgive me. I have suffered so much."

"Suffered," he murmured, with an indescribable intonation. "Suffered?"

Drawing himself from his reclining position against the editor's shoulder, he went towards the door. Bride followed him, entreating him to speak to her, to say anything—anything.

At length, wearied by her importunities, he turned on her, and his face assumed an implacable expression.

"Go, girl, go," said he. "I will never forgive you until you find out the murderer of Adam Glover—*never*."

Then Kennedy walked out on to the lawn, and through the soft, green grass, carefully supported by O'Brady.

The priest paused close to the bower library and gazed towards Kylenamanna. Already the mists of evening veiled the summit of the hill,

and hovered in gray dampness low over the dark wood. The eagle eyes lingered an instant on the far off trees as if fain to pierce to the heart of the mystery of that fatal day when the gentle Rector was done to death beneath their leafy shade.

“Peter, who murdered Adam Glover?”

The editor, startled by the abrupt question, hesitated before answering.

“Sir, it has always been my opinion that the Rector met his death at the hands of some members of Hinson’s secret association.”

“And I,” said Kennedy, as they continued their walk, “believe the deed was committed by one person, alone and unaided.”

CHAPTER III.

A LITTLE PRIVATE BUSINESS.

THE protracted struggle which Kennedy had with Hinson, combined with the prostration produced by his temporary fit of insanity, obliged the priest to keep his room for some days.

O'Brady waited on him, read to him, and employed his imaginative genius in inventing plausible excuses to visitors to account for the enforced seclusion of the master of the house.

Bride Killeen made several attempts to gain her usual footing in her uncle's favour, but she only succeeded in causing him to repeat, with renewed emphasis, that he would never forgive her until she found out the murderer of Adam Glover. After saying this he studiously avoided either looking at or addressing her, and when

absolutely necessary to communicate with her he did so through the medium of Sally or the editor.

Notwithstanding Father John's weakly condition, he could not rest until he had made a move with respect to the discovery brought about so unexpectedly by the fall of his niece's desk.

Some days previous to the tragedy, he had missed the Cuban dagger from its post on the mantelpiece, but took it for granted that it had been removed by Bride, on account of the superstitious dislike evinced towards it by the servant Jane.

Now it was evident that the weapon had been stolen by someone; but whether for the value of its setting or solely to be used as an implement of destruction it was hard to determine. Persons passed through the grounds of the chapel-house at all hours, and the doors and windows were generally left unfastened in summer. It would be easy to vault over the sill of the parlour window and snatch anything off the mantel-shelf and depart after the same fashion, unnoticed and unsuspected. But who had done so?

When Kennedy had reached thus far in his train of thought, he was arrested by the watchful editor.

“Time up, sir. Mustn’t think any more. You’re quite in a fever.”

The priest smiled, but only promised to give up thinking on condition that O’Brady would accompany Bride Killeen to Richard Neville and put all the circumstances of the case before him as magistrate of the district.

The young landlord was very much affected, when the girl related to him in detail her adventure in the Pass of Kyleneamanna on the day of the Rector’s death; but he was inclined to believe with O’Brady that the murder was committed by some members of the secret society, and that the assassins would never be traced unless the largeness of the reward offered might induce one of the accomplices to betray the remainder.

When Father John heard this, he shook his head and said :

“The murder was the act of one person, and not of a party.”

There had been a slight shower in the morning, but now the noonday sunshine poured in through the open casement of Bride Killeen’s bedroom and fell slanting across a small table, on which were scattered loose sheets of paper,

half scribbled over. The young girl was writing to Gerald Moore.

The air was fragrant with the perfume of the mignonette which flourished in profusion beneath her window, and the soft breeze from the mountain top gently rippled the white muslin curtain to and fro.

One tiny bird chirped saucily as he hopped on the sill, begging for crumbs ; but Bride was too busy with thoughts of her absent lover to heed the coquettish allurements of her feathered pensioner.

She gnawed the tip of her quill pen in desperation. How difficult it was to write naturally, and how stiff and formal, and how opposite to her real feelings her ideas seemed when put down in black and white on paper !

How delightful it would be to be able to write like Emily Neville !

Emily's letters always sounded just as if she were talking to you, and they were so nice and lively and clever that you couldn't help loving her while reading them. What a precious gift to be capable of bringing yourself so vividly before the mind of an absent friend !

"I don't believe Gerald will understand one bit what I mean," said Bride to herself, as she

enclosed her letter in an envelope, "it sounds all so confused. However, I might as well cry for the moon as try to do things after Emily's style. Uncle John must be right. Emily is a witch."

As Gerald's destination in America was to a farm somewhere in the Western States, belonging to Ned Delaney's uncle, it would be necessary to send to the Mount Farm for the address before post-hour. In her letter Bride had told her lover how deeply grieved she had been to part from him in such an unkind manner, but how she had found herself in honour bound to break with him for ever on account of a mistake of her own which was connected with an unhappy secret of her uncle's.

Now that everything had been cleared up satisfactorily with respect to this unfortunate mistake, she could only say to Gerald that she loved him and had done so even when she appeared to act most unkindly towards him. She had hoped he might have sent her a line from Queenstown. Surely he was not very—very angry with her?

Sall-o'-the-Wig came into the room, and bent over the young girl's shoulder. The peasant

woman could not read handwriting easily ; but the scattered sheets of scribbled-over paper bore a certain significance to her, and she was quick-witted enough to guess for whom they were meant. She scowled and muttered under her breath an Irish imprecation ; but remembering the letter she had still in her pocket with the Queenstown post-mark, which she had not delivered, and never meant to, she grinned maliciously and knowingly, and then coughed to attract attention.

Bride turned quickly round at the sound.

“ Well, Sally, what is it ? ”

“ Sure, miss, there’s a boy come from Mrs. Fogarty’s wid a note fur ye, and he’s to wait fur ye, av ye plaze.”

The girl took the note and read as follows :

“ MY DEAREST BRIDE,—

“ Come to me at once. I want you *most particularly*.

“ ELLEN FOGARTY.”

Bride smiled as she mastered the contents of this short missive. She did not believe the mistress of Baltore required her presence for anything more pressing than the fit of a new

dress or the choice of a best bonnet ; but yet she was too good-natured to refuse her friend the pleasure of her society, even if only to gossip about the latest Limerick fashions.

"Sally, I am going over to Baltore. You need not wait dinner for me."

"Very well, miss," said Sall, as she craftily eyed the half-directed envelope on the table. "And av ye don't mind givin' me yer letther, I'm a-goin' to post wan fur Father John."

The young girl hesitated an instant.

"I thought," said she, "of taking Mount Farm on my way. I want to get an address from Ned Delaney."

Now Sally had made up her mind to get possession of Bride's letter, and did not scruple in the least telling a lie to gain her end.

"Faix, miss, sorra a bit av ye'll find Misther Delaney at home. He's gone to Drumbawn, bud he'll call here comin' back. Give me yer letther, alanna, an' I'll git him to put the directions on id, an' I'll post id with me own two hands."

Bride still hesitated.

"Sally, will you be very—very careful ? I am very particular about this letter, and I wouldn't trust it to anyone but yourself."

"Sure, alanna, iv ye can't thrust me, *don't!*"

said the peasant woman, with an offended air, as she drew back her outstretched hand.

The young girl gave her the letter without another word, and then, clearing away the scattered papers, she got ready to start for Baltore.

When she closed the door behind her, and stood on the top step of the spiral staircase, she heard the sound of merry laughter coming from the priest's bedroom. Uncle John was so fond of American fun, she was sure Peter must be reading something comical out of an American newspaper. How she would like to listen to it, and enjoy it also ; but if she went in her uncle would turn away coldly from her.

Well, never mind, he couldn't always hold out not being friends with her ; besides, it was real happiness to get rid for ever of that awful feeling which oppressed her as long as she suspected he had killed the Rector.

She tripped down the winding steps so blithely that Jane, who was at the bottom, waiting with a basin of soup, screamed with fright.

"Och ! sure bud ye'll be afther brakin' yer nick wan av these days. An' iv ye'd made me spill broth afore three," she added, with a mysterious shake of the head, "bad luck would come to wan av us afore the year was out."

"Nonsense!" cried the girl with a laugh. "I'll never listen to any more of your superstitions. I am going to be always happy now. Always—always."

Then she ran out, and sprang lightly on the side-car, but before she could order the boy to drive on, O'Brady beckoned to her from an upstairs window to wait a minute.

"Where are you off to, Bride?" asked the editor, as he came out on the gravel path, and laid his hand on the cushion of the car.

"To Baltore; Mrs. Fogarty sent for me. How is Uncle John?"

"He is better, and would be all right if——" Here he stopped, and glanced knowingly at the driver, who, with head averted, was pretending not to listen; but O'Brady was too familiar with the tricks of his class to be taken in so easily.

"Jimmy, my boy," said he, "your mother is housekeeper at Father Rody Toole's, isn't she?"

"Yes, yer honour," answered the boy, with a smile of pleasure at being addressed.

"Well, I'm going to Drumbawn to dine with Father Rody on Sunday next, and I won't forget to tell your mother what a fine, strong fellow you are growing. Now drive on slowly to the gate and Miss Bride and I will follow behind."

So saying, he helped Bride off the car.

"Surely, you didn't mean it, Peter, when you said you were going to dine with Father Rody Toole?" exclaimed the girl as soon as the boy was beyond hearing.

"Why not, Bride?" said the editor, as he ogled her through his eye-glass. "I am not spiteful. Father Rody does not expect me, but I am content to waive ceremony and invite myself to his hospitable table."

Bride laughed.

"Well, Peter, your temper is too angelic. I confess I couldn't forgive anyone so readily."

O'Brady let his eye-glass drop from his eye as his mouth twitched with a humorous expression. After a moment his face assumed a more serious cast.

"Look here, Bride, I am as hoarse as a crow from talking, and almost at my wits' end inventing—ahem—I mean relating anecdotes to entertain Father John."

"No one can doubt your talent for invention, Peter," said she slyly.

"Oh! you wicked girl! Well, never mind, I'll pay you off another time. But, as I was saying, do all I can, I can't prevent your uncle dwelling on the murder of the Rector."

"The murder of the Rector! I thought he promised to think no more about it after we had been to Richard Neville!"

"There's no use; he can't get it out of his head. His latest fancy is something about the ring the Rector left you in his will, and which couldn't be found anywhere. You see, Reardon, the watchmaker, persists in saying that he returned the ring to Mr. Glover himself the morning of the day he was killed."

"Peter," said Bride, after an instant's pause, and laying her hand impressively on the editor's arm, "there is no longer need for concealment on my part; I saw the ring the day of the murder."

"You, Bride, you!" was his amazed exclamation.

"Yes. He showed it to me there below at the gate." As she spoke the tears welled to her eyes at the remembrance of the kindly face and gentle voice which would never greet her again. "Yes," she continued, "I had the ring in my hand—on my finger even that very day. I saw him put it in the folds of a letter which he returned to his waistcoat—nay, even he remarked to me that the contents of that self-same letter had caused him pain—much pain."

"Good Heavens!" cried O'Brady. "The

assassin must have taken both letter and ring, for there wasn't a trace of a paper of any kind on the body of the Rector when searched. Well, all I have to say to you, Bride, is, that if you had told us all this long ago the murderer might have been brought to justice."

"But——" she began.

"Hush—hush!" he interrupted, "that boy has the ears of a weasel. Look how they quiver! He is trying to catch what we are saying."

As they neared the gate they heard the steady regular tramp, tramp of many feet in march.

"Why," said the editor in an accent of surprise as he looked up the road, "what can a body of police want along here at this hour of the day? Well, boys, what is the matter?" he asked in a friendly tone, as he advanced to meet them.

"Ah! Mr. O'Brady, how do ye do, sir? Very glad to see you, sir. Sorry you lost your election. More luck another time, sir," were the various exclamations which greeted the editor.

"Sergeant, something uncommon brings you out to-day?"

"Well, I don't mind telling you, Mr. O'Brady," said the sergeant of police with a confidential air. "We are out on a little *private* business."

"Where to?"

"To the Widow Mahon's."

"Whew," whistled O'Brady, in astonishment:

"I never dreamt that the postmistress went in for the contraband. Sergeant," he added, with a wink, "if you find any potheen I'll charge you nothing for storage at the Shanty."

The sergeant opened his eyes wide and stared at him, and then seemed as if about to say something; but, on second thoughts, he merely saluted the editor in silence and passed on, followed by his men.

"What does it mean, Peter?" asked the young girl.

"Oh! they suspect Mrs. Mahon to be distilling whisky on her own account," was the answer, as he assisted her to get on the car. "You will have a beautiful drive. Give my love to Mrs. Fogarty. Now, Jimmy, my brave fellow, dash away!"

O'Brady waved his hand in adieu, and the jaunting car rattled along the dusty high road, whirling past fields, where the soft green corn was waiting for the sun to turn it to gold; past acres of rich pasture-land, whose varied hues of emerald, olive, and yellow-green spread in shining undulations as far as the eye could

reach ; past snug homesteads and freshly white-washed cabins ; past half-naked urchins, who hurriedly quitted their dabbling in the wayside pool and ran leaping and shouting behind. Then in between thick, low hedges, along whose base at either side clustered masses of sweet, fragrant wild flowers. The delicate pink-and-white blossoms and fragile trailing stems of the convolvulus twined lovingly round the rude, rough bramble ; the handsome violet flower of the mallow-plant hid its bloom beneath the surrounding leaves ; the pert snap-dragon cavalierly raised its head and set off to the best advantage its amber and orange tints ; and the humble honey-laden flower of the clover, so loved by bees, modestly rose in meek abundance under cover of its more self-asserting comrades.

The balmy air of the valley, and the rapid motion, imparted a brilliant freshness to Bride's complexion, and added depth and lustre to her shining eyes.

"The blue hills of my native land !" she cried involuntarily, as she rapturously surveyed the distant scene.

"Av ye plaze, wor ye spakin' to me ?" said the driver, turning quickly round.

"No, no. Drive on, Jimmy—drive on."

When they reached Baltore, the entrance-gate was lying half off its hinges, and the ducks, pigs, and asses were grazing and grubbing in company on the lawn.

Jumping off the car, Bride chased the animals into the adjoining stubble-field, and fastened them in with the aid of the boy, who was unused to see so much energy expended in keeping the place in order.

Mrs. Fogarty appeared on the threshold of the front door, with both hands extended in welcome.

"Oh, Bride!" she exclaimed, "I'm delighted to see you. I was afraid you couldn't get away. Come in; no, no—not there," she added hastily, as the girl approached the sitting-room to the left. "In here a moment. I must prepare you."

Bride, amused by her friend's eager manner, followed her into the pantry.

"I'm so sorry, dear, that you didn't put on a prettier dress," said the mistress of Baltore, inspecting the young girl from head to foot. "But never mind, you are always very nice and neat, and perhaps it is all the better not to be over-dressed. It won't seem as if you expected anything out of the ordinary."

"But is there anything out of the ordinary? And have you company?"

"Well, no, not exactly company; but when *he* asked me to send for you, and wished to see you *most particularly*, and all alone, why, it didn't take much cleverness to guess that the man meant to propose to you."

"He! Who is *he*?" inquired Bride, taken aback.

"Ah, my dear!" said Mrs. Fogarty, with a sentimental sigh. "You can't imagine the interest I take in your love affairs. It is the only shred of romance I have to brighten my everyday life. There was the Rector's nephew—now—now—Bride, don't blush," she added, as a roseate colour spread itself over the listener's face. "I'm sure you have too much common sense to waste your thoughts on one you're never likely to see again. Then there's Peter O'Brady, 'tis true he lost his election; but you have always him to fall back upon at any time. Then there was that snivelling, smirking hop-o'-my-thumb of a schoolmaster, who has been transmogrified into a dandy since he has been to Dublin. And as for Ned Delaney, I often catch him at mass with his eyes straying up to the corner of the gallery where you sit. Then——"

"Oh, please, Mrs. Fogarty!" interrupted the

girl, embarrassed. "Do spare me the list of my lovers. I assure you they have no existence except in your kind imagination. But tell me," she added archly, "who is this he? this wonderful he? I am dying to know."

"Well, my dear," said the lady with a smile, "if you take my advice you will neither say yes nor no. Keep him on."

"But who is he?"

"Hush! Not so loud, he may hear you. Keep him on. One never knows what turn of the wheel of fortune might make him famous. And then, my dear, how proud you'd be. Now, Bride, you promise me you will tell me all he says. Oh, I'm burning to know whether he'll go down on his knees to you, or stand up straight and put his hand to his heart. I never had a proposal. My mother made my match. It was merely so much money on one side and so many cows on the other. Oh! my dear, it would be rare fun to see that man down on his knees to you. I've half a mind to go round to the end window and peep in while you are with him. You wouldn't mind, would you? You wouldn't think it mean of me? It would be rich to see him on his knees."

"But who is he?" asked Bride, with a laugh, as soon as she could edge in a word. "Please

don't keep me any longer on the tenter-hooks. You have excited my curiosity to such a degree that you won't find it easy to appease it."

"Hush, my dear, hush!" said Mrs. Fogarty, in a mysterious whisper. "The man is—James Hinson!"

Bride's heart sank at this name. To her, the sound of it was fraught with distress. She knew well that instead of sending for her through any desire to pay court to her; as her kind friend seemed to imagine, Hinson must only wish to see her with reference to her uncle's unhappy attack. One more now knew their well-kept secret. Could they depend on him? Even if he did not betray them, might he not use his power over them for some purpose of his own? He was too shrewd not to be aware how by accident he had acquired an immense influence over those who were but too painfully anxious to keep the knowledge of Kennedy's misfortune from the outer world at the cost of any sacrifice.

Mrs. Fogarty led the way to the parlour, smiling and nodding, and was followed mechanically by the young girl.

"Keep him on," whispered the mistress of Baltore, as a final warning. "For the life of you, don't say 'No.' One never knows what may happen to a man nowadays. You might

have great reason to be proud of your conquest. Oh ! dear, what wouldn't I give to see him on his knees to you ! Now, I'll never forgive you if you don't keep him on."

Bride entered the room. The door closed behind her, and she found herself face to face with Hinson.

The first thing which struck her was the havoc made in his appearance by his recent encounter with her uncle.

His small, sharp eyes were not alone blood-shot, but sunken within loose ridges of swollen purple flesh ; his smooth, pink skin was rough and muddy-looking ; his delicate hands were a mass of bruises, and he wore a loose woollen wrap round his neck to conceal the scars on his throat.

Flung in a heap on the couch were the habiliments of disguise, ready for sudden need.

"Oh ! Mr. Hinson, we're so sorry, so very sorry, for what has happened," said she.

Taking no notice of this remark, he turned the key in the lock, and peered furtively through the window to see if there were no lurkers about. Then he approached the young girl, and, standing in front of her, he spoke :

"Miss Killeen, your uncle must be put under restraint."

CHAPTER IV.

A STRANGE ACCIDENT.

No words could have sent a sharper stab to Bride's heart than those uttered by Hinson: "Your uncle must be put under restraint."

The bare notion of such a thing had never even crossed her mind in any shape until now.

The very worst she had ever thought likely to happen was the finding out of the secret of her uncle's brain trouble, and the numbing stroke it would be to one of his acute sensibility to have his affliction made a common subject of talk. But to be put under restraint—this was, indeed, an unexpected blow!

"Oh! we'd rather die first!" she exclaimed, in great agitation. "Sir, have some pity. Do not speak to me in that dreadful way. Uncle John never used violence to any one before—

never—never. We are so sorry—so very—very sorry for what occurred to you. It was all our fault, but we will never leave him by himself again—never—never.”

“Sit down, Miss Killeen. Do not disturb yourself. Let us discuss this matter calmly,” said he, in his blandest tone, as he offered her a chair.

“Discuss calmly!” she cried. “Uncle John under restraint! Uncle John shut up in a lunatic asylum in the midst of raving maniacs! Oh! sir, you must think I have a heart made of rock to be able to calmly discuss anything of the kind with you or anyone else.”

“How foolishly sentimental women are,” he thought to himself, and then he said aloud: “To look at your uncle’s case from a common-sense point of view, let us suppose you and those with you had come a few minutes later to my succour and——”

“Oh! Mr. Hinson,” she interrupted hastily, “I know how clever you are at argument. I know how, if I listened to you, you could make me believe in spite of myself that you were right. I am only an ignorant girl; I cannot debate with you. But, oh! be generous—be generous. We are going to Italy the week after next to stay

with a doctor, a great friend of Uncle John's, who hopes to cure him. Oh! I beg of you, do not betray us now. He has suffered so much already."

"I merely made a suggestion," was his quiet rejoinder. "How could I betray you?"

She raised her eyes interrogatively to his. A smile gradually spread itself over his countenance.

"You forget, Miss Killeen, I am an escaped prisoner."

The sigh of relief which the young girl gave at this was far from flattering to the listener. Again he offered her a chair, and she no longer refused to take it.

"Excuse me," said he, going to each window and throwing open the lower sashes. "I have a marvellously subtle sense of hearing," he added in explanation, as he returned to the centre of the room and took a seat opposite Bride. "A sense which has been of immense benefit to me on various occasions."

There was an interval of silence. He was pondering how best to inspire confidence in this girl and get her to explain the mystery of her uncle's madness. At length, when he spoke, his voice had assumed its seductive charm.

"I wish you would trust in me," said he. "Do not fear for your uncle's secret. It will not be revealed through my means. Tell me, how long has he been subject to those attacks of mania?"

"The attacks have come on every three or four months during the past three years," was the answer, given in a constrained tone.

"But the cause? There must have been a cause?"

"Yes, there was a cause." This in a slower tone than before.

A small, fragile table—a mere toy piece of furniture—divided them. He leant his arms lightly on it, and regarded her with an expression of newly-awakened interest.

There was something attractive to him in the maiden purity of the girl's face, something in the frankness and simplicity of her manner, which took him off his guard, and made him inclined to be more expansive and less suspicious than was his usual habit.

"Do not fear," said he gently. "I will never disclose to any human being what you may choose to confide in me. Were it not for these marks," he added, extending his scarred hands, "I must believe myself the victim of

some strange delusion. Kennedy mad! The clearest brain, the brightest intellect, the strongest will-power! Mad! Kennedy mad!"

Bride winced, as if in pain, at each repetition of the word "mad."

"What *has* caused this misfortune?" he asked.

"I doubt if I have any right to tell you," said the girl. "It is scarcely delicate or fair to Uncle John to do so without his permission."

"I promise you, on my word of honour, never to mention a tittle of what you tell me. As it is," he added, noticing her hesitation, "I am the possessor of your secret, and so have a certain claim to know all the particulars about it."

Though Bride shrank from speaking of what concerned her uncle alone, still it was necessary to conciliate this man; besides, she did not in the least doubt but he would keep his word to her. Well, after all, it could do no harm to tell him.

He was watching her, and easily guessed what was passing through her mind.

"You must have known Mrs. Cullinan, of Clare?" said she.

"Rosaleen Cullinan? Yes, I knew Rosaleen Cullinan," he answered, almost antici-

pating this question, for the priest's agonised cry of "Rosaleen, Rosaleen!" still rang in his ears.

Yes, he remembered her—remembered her well—and the old house at Clare. How sunny and sportive the evenings were! How the scintillations of fancy sparkled over the board; and ever and anon, amid the playful interchange of light words, what bizarre devices were propounded—what strange projects were started for the advancement of the cause!

These were true *noctes ambrosianæ*. They were spent

—Not in toys, in lusts, or wine;
But search of deep philosophy,
Wit, eloquence, and poetry.

And Kennedy was the soul of all these social meetings. Beneath the spell of his magnetic influence even dulness brightened to brilliance, and mediocrity borrowed the mantle of genius.

And Rosaleen, with her glorious dark beauty, voluptuous and ripe, how right royally she queened it over them all! How proud she was of the flow of Spanish blood in her veins, to which she owed her clear, olive skin and her long almond eyes. What a superb figure she had, and how imposingly she swayed it, with

the unconscious stateliness of her presence set off by her black lace mantilla over her raven braids of hair, and her rich flowing robes of satin. And towards Kennedy alone did that regal head droop in tenderness and humility. No word nor sign of his ever escaped her, no——

“If you knew Rosaleen,” broke in Bride upon his meditations, “you must have known what happened to her.”

“No. I lost sight of her entirely after I left Clare,” said Hinson.

“Then, I will have to go back and explain from the beginning,” said the girl. “Ten years ago,” she went on, “Rosaleen’s husband died, leaving his wife and child totally unprovided for.

“As he had always kept an open house and lived in the most extravagant style, no one had any idea of the state of his pecuniary affairs, and he was generally supposed to be very wealthy.

“However, when the home was sold up, there only remained to Rosaleen forty pounds a year, which came to her from her mother, and had been settled on her on her marriage. This annuity was all she had to support herself and educate and bring up her son, a boy of thirteen

years of age. Rosaleen wrote to my uncle, telling him how she was situated, and stating her intention of putting her son to school and going out as a governess herself, and also asking him if he could recommend her to some family in that capacity."

"What a downfall for the haughty Rosaleen!" said Hinson. "Well, what did her generous friend, Kennedy, do then?" he added.

Bride was irritated at the manner in which this question was put.

"Sir," she retorted quickly, "Uncle John is always sure to do what is kindest and best for those he sympathises with; and thank God that he had it in his power to help her in her hour of need."

"Miss Killeen, you would make a staunch friend," was his remark. "Please go on, and forgive my interruption."

"When uncle received Rosaleen's letter he wrote to her at once, asking her not to make any move until she should hear from him again. Then he went to Dublin, and hired and furnished a small villa in the suburbs, convenient to a boys' school. Uncle has a little property in the outskirts of Ennis which brings him in something over two hundred a year. This sum

he proposed to set aside for Rosaleen's use, calculating that with it and her own forty pounds she and her son could live quietly but independently in the house he had taken near Dublin. From Dublin he went to Clare to lay before Rosaleen his plans for her future.

"At first she demurred to being a pensioner on his bounty; but, whatever arguments he brought to bear on her, she yielded in the end to his wishes. As soon as he saw her installed in the house outside Dublin, he made his will, and Rosaleen was to be my guardian in case anything should happen to uncle."

"What you relate interests me very much," said Hinson as she paused; "but pardon me one moment."

Whilst speaking he rose and went towards the side window. Here he stooped, and closing his eyes, concentrated his faculties in the act of listening. But he only heard the noisy cackling of the geese, the gossip of dairy-maids, and the lumbering tread of farm labourers as they passed to and fro.

Resuming his seat, he said:

"Please proceed, Miss Killeen. So then you must have seen Rosaleen Cullinan frequently at Lusmore?"

"Not at Lusmore. I have been with her for months together at Dublin. All I know of singing and music she taught me."

"But surely she must have been to the chapel-house some time or other?"

"No; and Uncle John never saw her again after the day he escorted her to Dublin."

"Why not?"

"Whatever his motive it must have been a noble and generous one," said Bride, as she turned her clear, candid gaze full on his face.

"Oh!" exclaimed Hinson, with a smile, as he raised his hand to where his beard used to be.

"Uncle John wrote to Rosaleen regularly every week, and she never failed to answer by the post which leaves Lusmore on Monday mornings. For seven years this correspondence was kept up, and then——" here she ceased as if overcome by some strong emotion. Her eyes swam with tears and her lips trembled.

"Go on," said he gently; "what occurred at the end of seven years?"

She tried to speak, but the words seemed to choke her.

He looked at her an instant and then rose and went again towards one of the windows. There were only the usual farm-yard sounds to

be heard. His pursuers then had not yet traced him to the valley. So much the better. He needed rest, mental and bodily. The throttling which Kennedy had given him had not alone shaken his frame, but somehow had impaired his thinking powers. When he reseated himself, the girl had altered her attitude. Her head was averted from him and slightly drooped forward. She took up the thread of her narrative :

“One Sunday afternoon, three years ago, Peter O’Brady came to the chapel - house unexpectedly. I say unexpectedly because he had sent a messenger from Knockbeg, on Saturday, with an excuse for not being able to dine with us on Sunday, on account of his being obliged to meet a friend from Dublin. Uncle John was somewhere about the fields when Peter arrived, and I ran out in the porch to welcome the editor, more delighted than I could tell to see him, because we were quite alone, and would doubly appreciate his cheerful company. His greeting to me was :

“ ‘Such grievous news, Bride ! Such grievous news !’

“I took this to be one of his usual teasing tricks, and made some bantering reply. But

when he said—‘don’t laugh, Bride ; don’t laugh. I’ve heard such grievous news about poor Rosaleen’—I knew he was in earnest, and I was frightened.”

“Go on,” said Hinson, as the girl paused, and drooped her head still forward, to hide as much as possible of the expression of her face.

“I think,” said she, “I will relate to you what happened as I knew about it after, and not as Peter told me.

“Rosaleen and her son had spent Saturday evening with some friends, and had remained rather later than usual.

“When leaving there was some difficulty about procuring a car or a cab, and Rosaleen, who was impatient at the delay, proposed returning home in an omnibus. Her friends objected to this ; but she insisted on having her own way. They say she was so beautiful and so buoyant that night. Her son had passed a most creditable examination, and, being a passionately devoted mother, she was half wild with pleasure. When her host saw her into the omnibus she waved her hand in a parting salute, and said :

“‘Good-night, dear friend. May you and yours be always as happy as I am now.’

“Poor Rosaleen——”

Bride gave a quick, short sob, and when Hinson heard it, he drew his chair closer to her with a noiseless movement.

“The night was dark—very dark, and it was beginning to drizzle, and those on the top of the omnibus got inside. During the delay, Rosaleen’s host struck up a conversation with the driver.

“‘You have to cross the canal?’ he remarked.

“‘Yes, over the bridge, yer honer.’

“‘One of your horses seems restive?’

“‘He’s only got the fidgets, yer honer. He can’t bear standin’. As soon as we’re off, he’ll be all right again.’

“Not satisfied with this answer the gentleman returned to the door of the omnibus, and said, earnestly :

“‘Rosaleen, I wish both you and Horace would get down and come back to the house. I don’t know why it is, but I don’t like the look of one of the horses, and just beyond the bridge the road is unprotected for some way.’

“‘No, no,’ was the smiling reply. ‘Good-bye, good-bye. Horace and I wish to be——’

“The horses started smartly, and prevented his catching the end of the sentence.

“The night was cold, and Rosaleen’s fellow-passengers must all have been anxious to get home. Home, poor things! The omnibus arrived at the foot of the bridge all right, but here the fidgety horse grew restive and plunged and reared. The driver managed to control it, and the crest of the bridge was reached. But, at this fatal spot, the man gave the nervous animal a stinging flick with his whip.

“The horse, either infuriated or frightened, reared again, and plunged and struggled until its companion grew as restive as itself. In vain the driver strove to whip them up; he had no longer power over them.

“They both reared simultaneously, high in the air, and backed on their haunches. Backed, backed—the weight of the heavy vehicle and the fall of the slope they had just mounted bringing the omnibus more quickly downward. The driver whipped and shouted, but it was useless. As soon as the omnibus got to the level ground, the horses, now utterly beyond control, and still backing, described a semicircle, until the hind-wheels ran over the granite ledge of a chamber of the canal at a lock, and with one powerful jerk passed it and hung over the waters——”

The girl, overcome by her feelings, gasped for

breath, and Hinson drew still closer to her and laid his hand softly over hers on the table.

“In the space of a second the heavy vehicle toppled over and went crashing down—down to the abyss below, dragging with it the maddened, plunging animals, and having shut up within it all those poor souls shrieking vainly for help. God rest them all? How they must have suffered in that awful moment! The lock was not to the full, but still there was water enough in it to cover the omnibus above the windows, and nothing was above the surface but the top-seats and the hat and cape of the driver. A passer-by, a soldier, had witnessed the accident by the light of the gas-lamps, and said after that the cries of the victims were heart-rending. As soon as the omnibus fell over into the canal, his first impulse was to rush to the man in charge of the lock and beg of him to draw the water off as fast as he could, so as to save those who might not have been killed by the fall. The man at the lock——”

“The man at the lock, what did he do?” asked Hinson, as his fingers closed round her hand and his eyes sought her face, no longer averted.

“The man in charge of the lock,” she went

on, no longer making an effort to check the sobs which would rise in spite of her efforts heretofore, "thought he would make the omnibus *float*, and opened the sluice-gates and let the waters rush down in a flood over the devoted heads of the poor creatures, and they were drowned. Not one was saved!"

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Hinson. "What an idiot! This, then, must be the man Kennedy imagined me to be when he tried to strangle me."

"When the bodies were recovered," continued Bride, "Rosaleen was in her son's embrace. Neither of them had a bruise or mark of any kind, and she looked as quiet and lovely as if she were sleeping."

"And this was the end of Rosaleen Cullinan of Clare! What a throe it must have been to your uncle!"

"It was, indeed, one that upset his mind, and nearly lost him to us."

"I was in America on business at the time it must have happened. Poor Rosaleen!"

Though Hinson said "Poor Rosaleen," his thoughts were less occupied with her and her tragic end than with the living, breathing girl before him, whose hand he had taken between

his own, and into the liquid depths of whose eyes he was looking.

There is no knowing what he might have been tempted to say at this moment, had not the sound of a light footstep coming along the passage outside startled him.

He leaped to his feet and dropped Bride's hand.

"It is only Mrs. Fogarty," said she, as there was a tap at the door.

CHAPTER V.

A VOICE IN THE NIGHT.

It was Mrs. Fogarty. She could no longer restrain herself; and, besides, any man who couldn't propose to a girl and receive her answer in the long half-hour she had left these two together would not, in her opinion, be worth the accepting.

As soon as Hinson opened the door, she assailed him with the words which she had already conned over and repeated to herself in the passage :

"Oh! please, excuse me; won't you have some dinner?"

"Presently, Mrs. Fogarty. Will you be kind enough to allow me another quarter of an hour with Miss Killeen?"

"Certainly, as long as you like," she said aloud, and then she drew him into the passage

and whispered: "Now, don't heed her if she says 'No' at first. All girls do. They never care to say 'Yes' just at once. And—and—oh! Mr. Hinson, *every* woman likes a man to go down on his knees to her."

He stared at her, but as soon as he divined her meaning a smile flickered over his face.

"Thank you," said he. "I will remember your advice."

"Now," said she, "I'll leave you for a quarter of an hour—but, mind, only a quarter of an hour," she added, shaking her finger at him. "Don't fear if you hear any noise about. I'll take good care you are not annoyed."

Hinson re-entered the room, closed the door behind him, rested his back against it, and looked towards Bride.

The girl had not changed her position since he had left her.

How graceful she was, how supple and symmetrical the lines of her fine form, and, above all, how innocent she was of her own attractions! A moment ago, when her hand was pressed between his, did she guess anything of the folly which possessed him, and which would have translated itself into words were it not for the opportune appearance of Mrs. Fogarty?

This girl's artlessness was something new to him. Was it real, or merely the perfection of art? What if he should bind her life to his? How it would aggravate Kennedy! No! he had no time to squander on love-making. His work was blocked out, waiting for him elsewhere. What madness to have permitted himself to be induced by Clarke's impetuosity to hurry on this rash affair in Ireland! It must injure his *prestige* with his colleagues abroad, unless he could make them view it in a light advantageous to himself.

Bride was astonished at the stillness, and questioned if she were alone. Hinson crossed the floor slowly and seated himself in the same chair as before, but farther back.

"Miss Killeen, how did your uncle receive the news of Rosaleen's death?"

"I will tell you," said she. "That Sunday when Peter O'Brady brought the sad tidings to the chapel-house, he and I decided not to mention anything about it until the next day. All that evening Uncle John was unusually lively, and worried Peter and myself on our lowness of spirits, and called us a doleful pair of owls. By a poignant coincidence he kept continually bringing the conversation round to Rosaleen.

He told us how he had written to her, asking her to come and spend the Christmas at the chapel-house with her son, and how we were all to be so pleasant and strive our best to make her stay agreeable. He planned how the furniture was to be arranged and altered, and where her chair was to be placed, and he seemed as if he had got back his youth all at once. 'Peter,' said he, as he looped back the curtain to try the effect of more light on the room, 'we must pull down that sombre picture from over the chimney-piece and put up a handsome glass instead, then we will have another mirror over there. I want to see Rosaleen reflected all about. How Adam will be charmed with her, and how delighted she will be with him——'

"Adam," remarked Hinson, "I suppose, meant the late Rector?"

"Yes," said Bride. Then continuing her narrative: "Mr. Glover called in at tea-time, and as soon as he saw uncle's face he said smilingly :

"'Why, John, what have you been doing to yourself? You look ten years younger.'

"'Adam,' was the answer, 'Rosaleen is coming to us at Christmas. See these two,' he added, pointing his finger at Peter and my-

self; 'I do believe they are jealous of her, for they haven't said a pleasant word to me all this afternoon.'

"How could we? We who knew that Rosaleen was lying dead and cold at the very moment he was thinking and speaking of her as if she were still full of life and beauty? You, who know my uncle, must know how reticent he is, even with his most intimate friends, where there is question of his private feelings; but this evening his heart seemed to overflow, and he found a most sympathetic listener in the Rector. When Mr. Glover was leaving, uncle saw him to the porch, and Peter and I, who followed them as far as the hall, could not help but hear their parting words.

" 'Adam,' said uncle, 'you cannot imagine with what joy I look forward to Rosaleen's visit.'

" 'John,' said the Rector, 'take care that you do not make an idol of a frail mortal.'

"At these words, uncle, who was standing by the open doorway, looked up at the stars. The light from the rose-tinted lamp which swung in the porch, fell sideways on his profile, and we, who were only two yards from him, saw the serene smile which hovered about his mouth.

“ ‘Adam,’ said he, ‘neither you nor man born could comprehend the height, depth, and extent of what I feel for the few beings who are enshrined within the inner circle of my heart. Your humanity is limitless, and can encompass the universe. But I am different. To me the world is nothing. My soul is bound up with those I love. For seven years I have not seen Rosaleen. Many a time since then I fain would have had the sunshine of her presence to lighten my home, but I dare not allow myself such a solace; for most of those who knew my admiration for her in my youth would be sure, through their own narrowness, to gauge me by their own vile standard. For myself I care not what they might say or think, for I hold my soul in bondage to no man or body of men, but it would have been worse than a million deaths to me if the breath of slander had even passed over the name of one who is and always will be to me the purest and noblest of womankind.’

“He stopped, but his countenance cleared almost immediately, and he went on again:

“ ‘Adam, you will like Rosaleen much. For seven years I have deprived myself of her society, and now I long to see her once more—once more and then no more.’

“There was something so disconsolate in his voice as he uttered the words ‘once more and then no more,’ that Peter O’Brady and I grasped each other’s hands in the companionship of sorrow. Our task was more painful every hour that slipped by.

“‘John,’ said the Rector, ‘you frighten me.’

“‘Frighten!’ said uncle. ‘Why should my happy mood frighten you? Old friend,’ he added, affectionately pressing Mr. Glover’s shoulder, ‘it seems to me that there must be some of your own nature stirring within me to-night, for I feel as if I fain would do good to even the meanest on earth. See, how beautiful the heavens and the stars are. Come, Adam, I will walk with you to the gate.’”

“The next day Rosaleen’s letter arrived as usual by the first delivery. The poor thing had posted it on her way to spend Saturday evening with her friends, and it was all touching her son and their forthcoming visit to the chapel-house.

“Uncle was so school-boyish and so glad this Monday morning that Peter and I felt more cowardly than ever about breaking the news to him.

“How could we bear to cast all his hopes with one fell swoop to the ground? How could we, indeed!

“At mid-day the Dublin newspapers reached us, and they gave a detailed account of the accident to the omnibus, and also the names of the victims. There was a special paragraph devoted to Rosaleen, expatiating on her grace and her accomplishments, and alluding to the romantic incident of the mother and the son dying in each other’s arms. We hid the papers away, and when uncle asked for them, Peter made such a lame excuse that uncle eyed us both suspiciously, and then, without a word, walked straight out of the house. Thinking that he had gone for a ramble we decided to send to the Rectory and ask Mr. Glover to help us to break the news. Before we had time to carry out our intention, we saw Uncle John returning across the lawn with an open newspaper in his hand, and we knew that our task was no longer needed. At the sound of his step outside the parlour our hearts throbbed with dread of what was to come; but when he entered, his countenance was blank of all expression and his manner was strangely quiet. He laid one finger on the column containing the

details of the accident, and said, in an ordinary tone :

“ ‘ Peter, is this true ? ’ ”

“ ‘ Sir—sir,’ stammered Peter, ‘ the will of God——’ ”

“ ‘ It is true, then,’ said Uncle John, and he laughed, and his laugh was so hollow and so mirthless that it seemed to freeze one’s blood. He tugged at the front of his Roman collar as if he were choking, and again he laughed that horrid, despairing laugh, and then he rushed out. Soon we saw him speeding across the fields to the hill of Kylenamanna. All that day in the lone, gloomy wood of Killavalla he wrestled with his grief, and God and nature and his own heart only know what he must have suffered.”

Hinson, who had been listening intently, and had gradually drawn nearer until his arms rested on the fragile table, now interrupted the girl, and said, in a tone of suppressed eagerness :

“ The wood of Killavalla ? It was there the body of the late Rector was found, stabbed to the heart, last spring ? ”

“ Yes.”

Hinson fixed his eyes on Bride an instant, opened his mouth, hesitated, and finally said :

“ Go on, please.”

"At night," she continued, "uncle returned. I placed some little delicacy I had been preparing before him. He never tasted it, and he never spoke, and his eyes were like two burning coals, and the rest of his face was still blank of all expression.

"The next day he rose early and went out again to the wood, and this night also, when he returned, he neither spoke nor tasted food. He seemed to be consumed with a devouring thirst, for long after I had sought my bed I heard him going up and down stairs searching for more water. This state of things went on for three days, and Peter and I began to get very frightened.

"At the end of the third day, when uncle had retired as usual, Peter and I sat up in the parlour until after twelve o'clock, considering how best to rouse him out of this desperate, silent despair. Suddenly, in the stillness of midnight, we were alarmed by a cry from above.

"'Peter, Peter! Lights! lights! Bring lights!'

"It was Uncle John's voice. Peter rushed hastily to the staircase. I took the large moderator lamp off the centre table and followed him. Sally Breen, who had been sitting up late

in the kitchen, mending her clothes, came up behind me and whispered in an awe-stricken tone ;

“ ‘Och ! miss, whin I heerd that cry, an’ I all alone be meself, I thought it was a banshee at first.’

“When we entered the upstairs room we found Uncle John leaning against the bed-post with his soutane on, and his bare feet thrust into slippers. His face was a ghastly gray, his eyes were like living fire, and he was shivering all over.

“ ‘Lights !’ he cried. ‘Lights ! more lights !’

“At a beck from me, Sally brought in my reading-lamp from the next room, and all the candles she could find, and soon the place was flooded with light.

“Peter laid his hand on uncle’s shoulders, and said :

“ ‘What is the matter ?’

“Uncle caught at him and said : ‘I am going mad !’

“ ‘Nonsense, sir, you’re only a trifle nervous. Come down to the parlour, and Bride will mull some wine for you.’

“ ‘Peter,’ said uncle again, ‘I tell you I am going mad ! mad ! mad !’

“Peter’s face for a moment became overshadowed with pain and excitement, but no unpleasant idea could long retain its hold on the light-hearted editor, and soon with a well-assumed smile he said :

“ ‘ Well, sir, I am surprised at you to give way like this. Do let me help you downstairs. No wonder you feel queer. Why, you have been three whole days without food. Come, sir, come down with us. Sally will rake up the kitchen fire, and Bride will make some nice mulled port, and the wine will warm you and do you good.’

“ ‘ Peter,’ said Uncle John, as he turned his burning eyes on the editor, ‘ I have not slept since—since I knew. A little while ago I was trying to doze when I heard a voice, close to my ear, say: “ John Kennedy, go out through that window.” I sat up in the bed and listened. The voice again said: “ John Kennedy, go out through that window.” Then I commenced to argue with the voice, and my brain seemed dual, and while one part of it was urging me to obey, the other was striving to keep me back. Thus for some time, all in the blackness and solitude, my twin-brains fought and struggled, one with the other, until at length a

horror seized me, and, slipping on to the floor, I groped for my soutane and slippers, with the thought of seeking you, for I knew you had not gone to bed. The slight physical exertion weakened me, and the voice clamoured so loudly at my ear, with its command of, "Go out through that window, John Kennedy," that I dreaded to move a step forward lest I might lose all control over myself. Then I shouted to you for lights and you came.'

"I felt my heart stop its beating as uncle spoke of this strange voice, and Sally, who was listening with wide-open mouth, crossed herself more than once.

"'Sir,' said Peter, 'come downstairs. This voice was a trick of your imagination.'

"Instead of heeding him, uncle glared towards the end of the bed, as if he saw something. What could he see there except the white Marcella quilt which I had taken that very morning out of the lavender-scented clothes-press, and had aired and put on the bed myself?

"'Bride,' shouted he, 'away with those scarlet-and-gold-bound books. Take them off the bed.'

"'Why, uncle,' I said, 'there are no books there!'

“ ‘Child,’ he cried, in an accent of reproach, ‘I know that as well as you ; but if your poor brain was seething like mine, you would see scarlet-and-gold-bound books, and other sights, too.’

“ ‘Do come downstairs,’ said Peter. ‘The warm wine will set you right.’

“ ‘Hush, hush !’ wailed uncle, and, recoiling from us, he raised his left hand in the attitude of listening.

“Then he crouched back against the bed-post, and his face turned a ghastlier gray, and his eyes burned with a lurid fire, and for a few minutes he seemed passing through the torments of some awful internal struggle, and we knew that the twin-brains he had told us of were striving for the mastery.

“ ‘Come, sir, come,’ said Peter, at length ; ‘do not give way in this manner. I never thought you could be so easily knocked over.’

“At these words, we noticed a change in Uncle John. He gazed steadily at the editor, and gradually his face put on its usual mask of determination.

“Rising to his feet, he straightened himself to his full height, and said :

“ ‘You are right, Peter. I *will* go down-

stairs, and he who says John Kennedy is going mad lies in his teeth !’

“With this he advanced a step or two, but when he reached the middle of the room, he stopped, swayed, and then cowered back again to the bedpost, trembling, and muttering :

“ ‘The voice—the voice !’

“Then there ensued another fierce struggle between the dual-brains, but Uncle John was not one to let himself be easily beaten down. His breath came and went in pants, and after a few seconds he made a fresh effort, and drew himself erect once more. His eyes flamed with scornful menace at some invisible foe, he threw back his shoulders and, clenching his hands, strode forward again.

“Alas ! He had only gone a few paces when his brow lost all its defiance, and his poor face was dazed and distorted. Like a blind man in a strange place he fumbled helplessly about, and then he called to us in broken syllables that lacerated us to the soul :

“ ‘Bride—Peter—save me—save me ! Oh, God ! I am going mad !’

“Before we could get to him he made a spring to the window, and, with a hysterical laugh, threw himself against the sash, crying :

“‘Rosaleen ! Rosaleen ! I come ! I come !’

“With a single impulse we all three flung ourselves on him. We just managed to save him from falling to the ground beneath, but the framework of the window was shattered by the force of his body, and his hands were torn and bleeding from the panes of broken glass.

“We carried him between us to a low chair. Sally fell on her knees and prayed aloud, and I threw my arms around him and called him by all the endearing names I could think of, beseeching him to speak to me or to look at me. But, alas ! all in vain. He knew us no longer.”

Bride paused and looked at Hinson.

“Sir,” said she, “the most painful thing in the world is to see those you love suffer, and to find yourself powerless to help them in any way.”

Hinson made no reply to this, but he thought he would not mind a little suffering, provided, to console him, those charming eyes might be bent on him with such a loving, compassionate light as shone within them at the present moment.

“He knew us no longer,” she continued. “He broke soon from our arms, and stamped to and fro through the apartment, raving wildly.

We guarded the door and window, but he made no further attempt to approach either. We gathered from his words that he saw enacted before him all the incidents of poor Rosaleen's death. He saw the fatal waters engulfing her, and he seemed as if held back by a grasp of iron from rushing to her rescue. Oh, the wrath and agony depicted on his face at these moments ! How he beat his hands against the walls in impotent rage ! How he strove to wrest himself from the demon of delirium which had him in its grip ! Then, again, he would grow calm, and appear as if he were addressing some great senate, and his countenance would be transfigured into the likeness of some inspired prophet, and his language was so lofty and poetic that we hearkened with hushed breath, awe-struck at the magnificence of his thoughts. But it was pitiful, oh, so pitiful ! This lasted the whole night through, and we dared not leave him even to seek a doctor. Luckily we had no visitors staying in the house at the time, and our servant, Jane, slept so soundly that she heard nothing of what was going on. The candles guttered and spluttered in the sockets and the lamp burned dimly for want of oil, when the dawn broke in on us with its cold, wan streaks of light.

Through the fractured window the morning breeze came freshly from the mountain. Uncle John had ceased raving, and now stood in the middle of the floor with his hand spread over his brow. After a while he approached the bed, and sank on it in a sitting posture with his head against the iron of the post, and then his chest heaved and he melted into a flood of tears. We gathered round him, not knowing what to do. To our consolation, God be thanked, he raised his head, smiled, and said, in the most natural way:

“ ‘ Peter, I have conquered at last. Let us go downstairs.’ ”

“ We were amazed. Could it be that Uncle John was about to recover his senses as unexpectedly as he had lost them ? He glanced from one to the other of us, and his eyes gave token of their usual steadfast intelligence.

“ ‘ I am all right now, my friends,’ he said. ‘ Let us go downstairs. I would like a cup of hot tea.’ ”

“ I cannot tell you what a load was lifted off our hearts at the idea of uncle being himself once more. Sally gave a whoop of delight, and capered almost to the ceiling, and then hastened to the kitchen to rake out the fire and boil the kettle.

“When we had Uncle John comfortably settled on the sofa in the parlour, he told us how he knew us the whole night through ; but that the invisible voice had always shackled him, and that he suffered beyond conception to free himself from its dominion. At last, as the dawn broke, a lightning flash of intelligence broke through his mind, and he recollected reading somewhere once how a madman relieved his distraught brain by shedding tears ; so he strove to weep, and to his rapture, as the tears flowed freely the ominous voice died away until its echoes vibrated no longer in his ear.

“The tea did uncle ever so much good ; but he looked so haggard and ill in the morning light that Peter O’Brady advised that we should send for a doctor.

“At this Uncle John lost his temper, and passionately exclaimed that he would die sooner than anyone except ourselves should know of his unfortunate attack.

“Then he made us all three promise that we would never disclose the scene of the previous night—never let anyone know how he had been temporarily bereft of reason.

“For three years Peter O’Brady, Sally Breen, and myself have faithfully kept our promise; and,

though Uncle John has had repeated attacks, we watched and tended him so well that, up to the present, no one has discovered our secret.

"You merely chanced on it by a careless oversight on the part of Sally Breen——"

"But surely someone must have suspected something of this before now?" said Hinson.

"We could not help people suspecting the existence of a secret," said Bride; "but then they never knew what it really was. When, after three months, Uncle John had a similar attack, his despair, on recovery, was dreadful to behold. But, though he saw looming before him all the tortures of a frequent recurrence of his affliction, he sternly refused to allow us to consult a doctor on the matter."

"I can well imagine how Kennedy's nature must have revolted against this fearful yoke," remarked Hinson. "I wonder he never thought of committing suicide."

"Uncle is a priest and no coward," said the girl; "and besides you forget he had us, Peter and Sally and myself, and we love him so, and would not shrink from sacrificing ourselves a thousand times over to save him from a moment's pain. Twelve months previous to

uncle's first attack of brain-trouble, a hunting friend of his made him a present of a beautiful horse, half Irish, half Arab, and because this splendid creature had no peer in the country round we called it Alphard, the solitary one, after the lone star of that name which shines aloof in the heavens."

"Kennedy was a dashing rider twenty years ago," broke in Hinson. "We used to call him the whirlwind. As it is, I have often had to regret my own inability to ride. You will scarcely credit it, but I have not been on horseback more than twice in my life."

"How very strange," remarked Bride. "Alphard," she continued, "grew almost miraculously attached to Uncle John, and would follow him about anywhere, and would come and look in at him through the parlour window whilst he was reading. Amongst the inhabitants of Lusmore, our horse soon gained the reputation of being possessed. The crones of the village gave out that Alphard was a restless spirit who was driven from the other world on account of his sins of pride and vanity, and was forced to roam the earth in the form of a steed.

"If you could see our beautiful Alphard spring up mountain passes, plunge into deep gorges,

skim light as a bird across the surface of a sinking bog, and go into and over places inaccessible to any other horse, you wouldn't be surprised that our peasantry should credit him with supernatural origin, and cross their foreheads as they saw him scud past them with Uncle John. When uncle recovered from his third attack of brain-trouble, he called in the gray of the morning for Alphard, and, in spite of our expostulations, he rode forth fasting. He didn't return till late that afternoon, and Sally and I hurried out to meet him. When he got off the horse, he coughed slightly, staggered against the porch from sheer weakness, and we noticed that his lips were stained with blood. Thoroughly frightened, we no longer thought of consulting him, but sent in haste to Knockbeg for the best medical advice we could procure.

"Uncle was himself in a few days, but the doctor strictly ordered him to give up riding exercise, and warned us that he must be carefully looked after and kept from all violent emotion. After a while, Alphard began to pine from inaction. Uncle prized the beautiful animal too much to degrade him by having him harnessed to the jaunting-car, so he sent him to the Mount Farm to be cared for and exercised daily, giving

strict injunctions that no one was to mount him except Ned Delaney himself——”

“I remember Delaney once wishing me to visit his stables to look at some remarkable horse. Probably it might have been your uncle’s. However, I declined. I have never been an animal fancier.”

“Oh ! but our Alphard is a superb creature, and his eyes have the same expression as those of a human being.”

Hinson smiled at the girl’s eager manner, and then remarked :

“Well, Miss Killeen, you could scarcely expect me to take the same interest in your uncle’s horse as in himself. You mentioned something about going to Italy.”

“Yes,” said she. “About six months ago Doctor Pinti of Genoa wrote to Uncle John, describing the wonderful recovery of a patient of his who had been for years subject to intermittent attacks of brain-trouble. The details of this case were so exactly similar to those of uncle’s that he was greatly impressed, and, to our delight, decided on revealing his own state of mental health to his clever Italian friend ; the result of which decision is that we start for Italy the week after next. Dr. Pinti will meet us in

Dublin, and Uncle John, Sally, and myself will accompany him to his home in Genoa, to remain there until such time as uncle shall be thoroughly cured. Ned Delaney has promised to look after the garden and farm while we are away, and Jane will have her married niece to stay with her at the chapel-house.

“Father Terence Delaney, by uncle’s special desire, has got leave to take charge of the duties of the parish during our absence. The strangest thing is that in the private instructions, which Doctor Pinti sent to me with respect to the treatment of Uncle John, he lays particular stress on the necessity of making uncle shed tears during his paroxysms.

“Now, you remember how on uncle’s very first attack he regained possession of his senses by weeping copiously. This, sir,” concluded Bride, “is the whole history of our sad secret. I am deeply grieved that you should have suffered so much at uncle’s hands; but, under the circumstances, no man could bear animosity towards him.

“We have strong faith in the skill of Doctor Pinti, and look forward with great hope to the prospect of seeing Uncle John completely restored to physical and mental health.”

She ceased to speak, and Hinson regarded her with deeper interest than before. What a charm there hung about her ! While women of Rosaleen Cullinan's weird powers of fascination always weave a spell at first sight, this simple girl's gift was to steal into the heart of a man and abide there for ever.

As he watched her he was seized by an infatuation to act on Mrs. Fogarty's advice, and fling himself at Bride's feet. Why should he not gather her life unto his ? Why not have one faithful heart to throb in unison with him, and into which he could pour all his ambitions, all his hopes, his fears, and his plans ? If this girl could be capable of such unfaltering devotion and love to her uncle, how inexhaustible would be the fund of loyal attachment and adoration which she would bestow on the *one* nearer and dearer than all !

And above and beyond everything she was *Kennedy's* niece.

"You are thinking how my uncle must have suffered during those three painful years," said Bride, interrupting the train of his meditations.

"My thoughts were partly of your uncle," he replied, with some confusion.

Hinson for the time being was in love, and love

coming to him in the middle period of his life was so novel and overpowering a sensation that he became partly oblivious of his present position and present danger.

His alert mind was no longer on the watch, and his keen ear temporarily lost its delicate acuteness. What should he say to her, how draw her gently but surely within his influence?

Should he tell her of the vastness of his secret organisation and of all he had already accomplished and meant to accomplish? Being a woman, she would admire, and her admiration would not be disturbed by the leaven of envy which inevitably stirs within a man when listening to the recital of deeds done by his comrade, and not by himself. Or should he tell her how he was alone—all alone in the world, without one trusted being who cared whether he lived or died, without love or friendship or family ties? Should he tell her how human he was, and how, like every other human being in the universe, there lurked at the bottom of his heart a hunger to be understood, sympathised with, and loved by at least one other human being?

Hinson's head sank on his breast, and the young girl believed he was deliberating about

what message he would send to her uncle. She amused herself by watching the sun's rays play through the branches of an elm in the yard outside. She listened to the cackling of the noisy geese, the gossip of the dairymaids and the lumbering tread of the heavy-shoed farm-labourers. After a short interval she heard the faint ringing of a horse's hoofs in the distance.

"There is a horseman approaching," she cried hastily. "Perhaps it is someone in search of you."

Hinson leaped to his feet, and in an instant his well-practised habits of quick perception and ready action reasserted their power. Love was thrown aside for the time, for he was all instinct with the sense of self-preservation. Expeditiously investing himself in his disguise, he ran to one of the side windows, but before he could vault through he was arrested by the girl's soft voice :

"After all," said she, "the rider is only one person. He may be a friend. Besides, he is coming along the boreen, and no one ever comes that way except he belongs to the Mount Farm."

He hesitated, advanced towards her, stopped, and spoke :

"Perhaps you are right. It may be a friend. I will wait and see."

Bride approached the front window and looked out. The sound of fleet galloping came nearer and nearer. At length she leaned her body half-way through the sash and exclaimed :

"It is Ned Delaney!" Then, turning towards Hinson, her eyes sparkled with pleasure, and she added: "He is riding Alphard—our beautiful Alphard!"

The owner of Mount Farm jumped off the horse, hung the reins loosely on the swinging gate, and hurried across the lawn to where he saw the young girl. He put his head in at the window, and called out to Hinson in agitated tones :

"Come! There is not a moment to lose! You have been tracked to Lusmore, and mounted constables will soon be scouring the valley on every side. Your only chance of escape is by means of Alphard. There is not a horse in Ireland could overtake him, and you must get on his back and fly for your life."

"But is there no other way of escape?" said Hinson. "I cannot ride in the least."

"There is no other way, and as for the riding, I've arranged that for you," replied the farmer. "The police are scattered all about hunting for you. They have been to Kate

Mahon's under pretence of seeking for a private still. She at once suspected their object, and, leaving them to find what they might, and the shop to take care of itself, she hurried to me to warn you. She also gave me this for you with her best wishes."

Here the farmer took out a small roll of single pound notes from his waiscoat pocket.

"Who can have tracked me to this valley?" said Hinson. "I will take Mrs. Mahon's notes," he added, "and please convey my grateful thanks to her, not alone for this, but for all she has done for me heretofore."

The farmer rapped the handle of his whip impatiently on the window-sill as if to hasten the movements of the "master," who still lingered.

"Quick! quick!" said Delaney. "There is not a moment to be lost. The police may be here any instant. You must make a cut straight across the country towards either Limerick or Knockbeg. Come! come!"

Hinson passed out into the hall and opened the front door.

"I suppose," he remarked, with a shrug of resignation, "there is no alternative but to trust myself to the mercies of the horse, for I assure you I can't ride at all."

“Quick ! quick !” cried the farmer, pointing towards the swing gate. “Never mind about skill in riding as long as you can stick to your seat. That’s all that is needed. Come on, for heaven’s sake !”

Hinson turned to the young girl who was standing behind him, and taking both her hands between his own, he said :

“Miss Killeen, if I manage to keep my liberty to-day the New Year will find me in Genoa. Until then, farewell.”

So saying, he gave one last glance at her face, dropped her hands gently, and hastened to join the farmer.

CHAPTER VI.

MAN PROPOSES, BUT GOD DISPOSES.

MRS. FOGARTY came into the hall just in time to witness the look of adieu which Hinson gave into the young girl's face; but when she saw him turn away and close the door behind him, her disappointment was extreme.

"Oh! Bride," she cried, "what is the matter? Where is he gone to? And you haven't refused him, have you? I wouldn't let them interrupt you; and the cook is in an awful temper, and the mutton is roasted to rags. Is he coming back to dinner?"

The girl passed her arm round the portly waist of her friend, and said:

"The police are in chase of Mr. Hinson, so he had to fly, and we must be content to eat our mutton without him."

Mrs. Fogarty shook her head and sighed as she brushed Bride's hair from her forehead.

"Ah!" she remarked, "there's no knowing what a man like that may turn out in the end. Ups and downs, my dear, ups and downs. Come into the pantry a few minutes. I'm dying to hear everything that passed between you. My husband and the men had a goose for their dinners, and are gone back to the field; and as the shoulder of mutton is only for you and me it can wait a bit, for it couldn't be drier than it is, and the cook couldn't be crosser. Now," she continued, "tell me how did he propose?"

"Propose!"

"Yes, propose. Don't be shy, my dear, with me. I feel just as if I were your own mother. I am dying to know everything. Did he go on his knees, and what did he say?"

The girl burst into a merry laugh.

"Oh, you dear old foolish darling!" she cried, "you are always thinking that everybody must be as fond of me as you are yourself. Mr. Hinson never dreamt of any folly of the kind. I assure you, we have been talking of uncle the whole time."

"I never gave the man credit for being such a fool," said Mrs. Fogarty, much chagrined. "Anyone with half an eye could see how madly he is in love with you. And not to propose to you after all, and I gave him such an opportunity! I've no patience with him. Never mind, when you go to Italy you may have a count or a marquis for a sweetheart. Oh, Bride, how I shall miss you!"

"I wish you were coming with us, dear," said the girl gently. "How you would enjoy seeing the beautiful paintings and works of art."

"Ah, Bride, dear heart, I'm doomed to be a farmer's wife, and only a farmer's wife to the end of the chapter! If my mother hadn't wished to get rid of me so soon, who knows but I might have turned out to be a great artist—a Raphael, or a Michael Angelo. As it is—Well, well, dear," she added, "it can't be helped; let us talk of yourself. You see even if the count and marquis do not come to the point, you will always have Peter O'Brady to fall back upon."

"Come," said the girl playfully, "leave the men alone, and let us have our dinner, or your husband will be back to tea before we have finished."

They went out into the hall, and along the

passage to the dining-room door. Before they entered, Mrs. Fogarty looked up and down the passage, and then laying her hand on Bride's shoulder, she whispered :

"Do you think he did it?"

"He? Who? What?" exclaimed the young girl, dumbfounded.

Mrs. Fogarty looked along the passage again to make sure that none of the servants were about, and then she approached her lips a second time to Bride's ear, and said under her breath :

"Do you think it was Hinson who stabbed the Rector in the wood of Killavalla?"

Bride stared at Mrs. Fogarty with eyes full of horror. At length she gasped :

"And you could think that of him—and—and——Oh! how could you?"

"Hush, hush, not so loud. They may hear us in the kitchen. I have no reason for what I said, but the thought struck me at the moment, and my foolish tongue let it out. Oh! my dear, don't look so frightened, or you will make me most unhappy. Do cheer up and forget my silly words."

Whilst speaking she drew the girl into the dining-room. Bride passively allowed her move-

ments to be guided by her friend, but her mind was echoing with her uncle's words :

"I will never forgive you until you find the murderer of Adam Glover."

Good-natured Mrs. Fogarty was sincerely grieved at the effect produced by her awkward query. She rang the bell for dinner ; and then, before seating herself at the table, which was laid for two, she twined her soft, plump arms round the girl's neck and kissed her.

"Bride," said she, "if you have any real affection for me you will not think of this any more."

"Indeed, I do love you very much," said the girl, striving to force a smile. "What you said gave me a great shock, but I am not going to annoy you with my gloomy ways. Come," she added, slipping into her friend's seat, as the servant entered with the tray, "I will take the mutton myself. You know how I pride myself on my carving."

Bride made an effort to chat pleasantly with Mrs. Fogarty ; but she could not prevent her thoughts occasionally wandering, not to the dead Rector, but to his nephew, her absent lover.

Did Sally get the address from Ned Delaney

and post the letter to Gerald all right? Sally must have made a mistake; Ned Delaney could not possibly have been to Drumbawn, but then she was to be trusted, and would be sure to find a way to have the letter properly directed before post-time.

If Bride could only have seen into the kitchen of the chapel-house at that very moment.

Sall-o'-the-Wig was there, seated on a three-legged stool in front of the fire, chuckling to herself, as she watched the flames devour two letters. One of these letters was Bride's own; the other was from her lover, Gerald, written by him at Queenstown, before embarking for America, and containing a moving appeal to the young girl, begging to know her reason for breaking with him for ever, and entreating her, if she still loved him, to write him one word.

Sall had been artful enough to get the address from the master of the Mount Farm shortly after the departure of Bride for Baltore; but she had no more intention of posting the letter than she had of delivering that from Queenstown, which had been in her pocket for the last couple of days.

When the last shred of paper was burnt, Sall thumped her knee with delight, and exclaimed :

“Hurroo! Misther Pether O’Brady, me darlint, there’s wan more av thim out av yer way.”

The only witness to this act of incendiarism on the part of Sally was the black cat, who sat on the hob, and whose glassy green eyes watched her every movement. When the woman mentioned O’Brady’s name, the cat gave a long, lugubrious mew.

Sall jumped to her feet and crossed herself.

“Oh, thin, ye baste av the world,” she cried, as she dislodged the uncanny animal with the tongs, “be off wid ye. Yer not natheral; I could a’most swear I saw ye wink at me.”

CHAPTER VII.

THE BEAUTIFUL ALPHARD.

THERE have been few better judges of a horse than the late Abd-el-Kadher, and both the eyes and heart of that picturesque Emir would have been delighted at sight of the beautiful, impatient creature who now stood restlessly pawing the ground outside Mrs. Fogarty's while Ned Delaney was urging Hinson to instant flight.

Alphard had all the twelve principal points so insisted upon by the gallant Emir; the three broad, the three narrow, the three long, the three short. He was also of the favoured colour, a deep, rich bay, and on his broad forehead there gleamed the white star of lucky omen.

Peter O'Brady used to maintain that he had seen Father John's horse stoop his graceful neck and drink from a running stream without even

bending in the least his graceful limbs. But then, as one of the editor's townsfolk said of himself, "O'Brady was the honestest and most truthful of men, but it didn't do to believe half his—his stories."

But even an ordinary observer would have been struck by something very much out of the common in the aspect of the unique creature which John Kennedy had poetically called after a lonely star of the firmament—something which if belonging to a man would be best translated by the word genius, but which belonging to a horse had not yet found a name.

As Hinson crossed the neglected, unkempt lawn, and cast his keen, observing glance towards the restless animal, his attention was immediately attracted by this unusual something. When he approached nearer Alphard turned his head slowly round, and Hinson involuntarily started backwards.

"The creature has the eyes of a human being," said he.

"You are not the first to notice that," remarked Delaney. "Up with you. There's no time to lose."

"I cannot ride a bit, I tell you, and besides, he may throw and lame me. I really believe

I had better trust to my feet. I know the country well, and will manage, somehow, to get away."

"Alphard will not throw you," said the farmer. "He is as easy to sit on as an arm-chair, and as sure on his legs as a mountain goat. As to trusting to your feet, much good they'd be in trying to escape from the mounted police! Up with you, again I say, it is a case of life or death."

Hinson hesitated an instant, and then shrugging his shoulders with an air of resignation he proceeded to mount the horse. As he put his feet in the stirrups and took the reins from the farmer's hands, the latter remarked:

"You cannot fall off with that high cantle behind, and those stuffed flaps, but in case of the worst, I've hit upon a dodge for you," and he pointed to two straps of leather, which, attached to the pommel on to the saddle-skirts, when buckled would fasten the thighs of the rider securely in position.

"Take these straps away," said Hinson with a sarcastic accent; "I am not an infant that I should be tied in a seat. I am no rider, but I can keep on the horse's back, and before he flings me off he will come to the ground himself."

There was such an air of conviction and latent power in the way those words were uttered that they could not fail to impress Delaney, who, though sorely chagrined at the contempt his wonderful contrivance had met with, took off the straps at once. While doing so he said :

“ You don’t need whip or spur. You have only to touch him with your left leg, and he’s off like a shot. To stop him you have only to press his withers—here, I mean. Ah !” continued Ned, as he moved off a step or two and surveyed Alphard, “ you’re a beauty. There’s not a peeler’s horse in Ireland’s ground is a patch on you. You pet, you know I’m talking of you.”

The horse gave a whinny of pleasure, and made a few fretful ambles.

Delaney was getting fretful at the delay, too, and urged the “ master ” to be off.

“ While we’ve been parleying here,” he cried, “ we’ve lost precious time, and the police may pop on us any moment. Take my advice, and ride up the boreen, and then get round the side of my farm and cut across country fast as you can to Knockbeg. Once there you are all right. As to Alphard, let him loose anywhere, he’ll soon find his way home. Now, God speed ! ”

Instead of starting, as Delaney expected him to do, Hinson bent forward on the saddle as if listening for some distant sound.

"There are two horses coming in this direction," said he, pointing towards the road to Lusmore.

"Then in heaven's name be off! Quick! Up the boreen with you! It must be the police."

"I am not going by the boreen," said Hinson, "I have made up my mind to meet those men."

"Hang it, man, are you crazy?" cried Delaney. "Well," he added, as Hinson turned on him a cold look of surprise, "if you are so foolhardy I will go with you. If there are only two I can easily manage them. With one hand tied I can throw the best wrestler in the valley."

"You will remain here," said Hinson quietly. "I advance alone."

There was in the "master's" words an inflection of command, and the stalwart farmer, used to succumb to the influence of those languorous but imperious tones, now felt himself constrained to obey in violence to his own better judgment.

"Go on, Alphard," said he reluctantly, as he stroked the animal's quarters.

The beautiful creature, who had backed a few yards under his strange burden, now, prompted

by the farmer's familiar voice and caress, advanced along the pathway, which was lined on one side by the rugged fields of Baltore and fringed on the other by a thick grove, behind which rose a dark hill, on whose sides hundreds of sheep were browsing.

Delaney was not half satisfied, as he leaned against the swing-gate and watched the retreat-form of the "master." Almost at once he saw appearing at the end of the road two large-framed policemen mounted on huge horses.

Hinson rode deliberately in between them, and then Alphard stopped, and horse and rider were motionless as if turned to stone. At the swing-gate the farmer's blood boiled with excitement, and he pulled himself together for the fray. He was determined not to let the "master" be taken without a struggle.

The constables reined in their horses at either side of Hinson, and each simultaneously put out a hand and grasped him by the cape. Notwithstanding his disguise of dark hair and whiskers, and brown Inverness overcoat, they knew immediately they had found their man.

"James Hinson, in the Queen's name, I arrest you."

Hinson smiled, and bending his head with

an expression of gracious courtesy, he said in his suavest voice :

“My friends, you have your duty to do, but your grip is hard. You hurt me. Is this necessary?”

The men, taken off their guard by his not showing any resistance, apologised, and slightly relaxed their hold.

Still smiling in their faces, he writhed himself, with an unexpected serpentine movement, free from their grasp, leaving the cape of his coat in their hands, and pressed Alphard's side with his left leg. At his touch the spirited animal made a sudden spring forward, and, like a streak of lightning, horse and rider flashed round the corner of the road and disappeared from view.

In Alphard's rush he had come into collision with one of the chargers, and the latter, staggered by the shock, unseated its rider, who fell sprawling to the ground. His comrade, stunned at the escape of Hinson, seemed to have completely lost his presence of mind. The fallen man, who still held the bridle, rose, cursing viciously, and remounted.

“Damnation !” he cried. “He's Satan himself. Let's after him. To think we should actually have him in hold, and he should get off !”

The policemen turned round their chargers, dug the spurs into their flanks, and clattered at full tilt in the wake of Hinson, their sabres and carbines banging against sheath and bucket with every beat of the hoofs. But they were heavy, and their horses were built more for weight-carrying than making a pace, and pounded hopelessly along, handicapped as they were with ponderous cavalry saddles and jingling accoutrements.

Delaney laughed heartily at the discomfiture of the constables, and as soon as they vanished he left his post by the swing-gate to seek a point from which he could command the surrounding country and watch the chase.

When Alphard left the confines of Baltore, and reached the high-road, he careered along at a racing speed. For the first few minutes Hinson felt exhilarated by the quick exercise; his pulses bounded with unwonted excitement, and he exulted as if endowed with a new faculty at being astride of this noble creature, who carried him forward with such a smooth, arrowy motion. He smiled in calm derision when he heard behind him the galloping thud of the chargers. At Alphard's present pace his pursuers could not possibly overtake him, and once he could get

within a mile's radius of Knockbeg, he knew an effectual way to baffle their vigilance.

On—on tore Alphard, past farmsteads and pasture lands. On—on, down into the dip of the valley, with its smiling panorama of grassy slopes and spreads of tillage to the right, and its frowning mountain to the left. The labourers abandoned their work, and ran to the sides of ditches and hedges.

“Look, look!” they cried to one another. “’Tis Father John’s daymon horse, and, God be merciful to us, he’s running away!”

On—on tore Alphard, his light feet skimming the dry road, and at a gradually increasing interval resounded the sullen hammering of the two massive chargers. But, though the constables urged their well-trained horses with might and main, by shout and steel, still they never could gain an inch on the glorious thoroughbred.

At one part of the road the path wound by the base of the steepest side of Kyleneamanna.

When Alphard had reached this point, he slackened speed as if instinctively, and Hinson’s delicate ear caught the sound of horses approaching from the direction of Lusmore. By their regular, martial tread, he guessed that they, too,

must belong to the constabulary. Police in front and in rear, an open country to the right, and a precipitous acclivity to the left, what was to be done now?

Should he, while there was yet time, slip from the animal's back, and, trusting to the nimbleness and sureness of his own feet, clamber up the rugged side of Kyleneamanna?

Surely, he could manage to elude his pursuers for a few hours by making straight for the Wood of Killavalla, diving into its intricate depths, and remaining there till after dusk.

The sensitive Alphard, who had distinguished the approach of the newcomers almost as soon as Hinson, dropped into a walk, and, finally halting, stretched his neck up and down and all around with a sagacity almost supernatural. It would seem as if the beautiful horse fully realised the peril of his rider. With a graceful movement he turned his body sideways and faced the mountain, then he backed in zig-zag until his tail almost switched the bank at the opposite side of the road. On his left the mounted constables from Baltore advanced faster and faster, and on his right the noise of hoofs from Lusmore came nearer and nearer. Head thrown back, ears uplifted, nostrils quivering, eyes on fire, Alphard

waited in sinew-strained expectancy, his hind-legs slightly bent and his fore-legs extended.

Hinson, whose ready mind seized all sorts of possibilities, decided to remain as he was until the newcomers should be in sight.

Perhaps, though wearing the garb of policemen, they might be friends, might even be members of the brotherhood.

In a few moments, two mounted constables appeared within a few yards' distance at a turn of the road, and Hinson suddenly put his hand into his breast over the spot where the diamond star was concealed. The police, alarmed at this movement, stayed their course, believing he had a loaded revolver and meant to fight for his liberty.

"Don't shoot," shouted one of them. "We know you, Hinson. The game's up. Better come quietly."

Hinson smiled to himself at their mistake. He never carried firearms.

Nearer and nearer came the chargers from Baltore, and, while his acute ear could gauge to a foot the space which lay between them and him, his apparently indolent regard remained fixed on the men from Lusmore.

Keeping his hand still in his breast, he pre-

pared to slip from the horse's back and make a dash for it up the mountain. But he had not reckoned on the animal beneath him. Alphard had a will of his own. Before he could disengage himself the marvellous steed made a flying leap across the fence and galloped on to the base of Kylenamanna. Without thought of refusal, he worked up the sides of the mountain with almost incredible activity, bounding from one spot to another with an ease more like that of a deer than a horse, and appearing in his flight as if he had wings—not feet. Hinson instinctively leant forward to keep his balance. The unexpected movement on the part of the animal would surely have upset him were it not for that ever unfailing presence of mind which made him cling closely to the horse directly he felt the least movement beneath him, and which also made him conscious that to save himself he must not meddle with the curb, but must hold on like grim death, and trust implicitly to the strange creature who thus bore him onwards and upwards.

When midway up the ascent there came the ping of a shot. The baffled constables were practising with their carbines on the State offender who had taken French leave in such off-

hand style. But Hinson only laughed. Even although he might not be qualified to ask a situation as rough-rider in a cavalry regiment, he had knowledge of musketry enough to convince him that the Irish constabulary were not proficient at judging distance, and that the chances were fifty to one against their hitting a shifting mark.

When Alphard heard the shot he arrested his flying steps, and turning round on a smooth green plateau gazed below at their pursuers, who greeted both horse and rider with a volley which fell far apart of the aim. In answer Alphard gave a wild neigh of defiance, and Hinson, who had scarcely yet recovered his breath from the suddenness of his upward flight, still managed to graciously doff his hat in mockery of those beneath.

Presently, before he could make any effort to guide his horse, the sagacious creature carefully left his position on the green plateau and picked his steps sideways for several yards, and then bent headlong down the mountain at a pace that almost deprived Hinson of his sight. However, with the instinct of self-preservation, he leant back on the cantle, so as to relieve the animal's fore-feet from the weight of his body, and as

Alphard swooped along he shut his eyes and gave himself up entirely to the guidance of his strange steed ; the rapid motion and the peril of his situation leaving him no other choice. When he unclosed his eyes again, he found that they had reached the base of the mountain in safety, at a point some quarter of a mile higher up than that where they had quitted the road. The police were standing in a confused group, carbines in hand, undecided how to act. After a moment's deliberation they looked to their girths and vaulted into their saddles, which they had left when firing at Hinson. Throwing a backward glance at them, the spirited Alphard gave a fresh neigh of challenge, headed straight for the fields, and took a line across the country. The constables, having paused in natural surprise, not unmingled with admiration, determined to follow. They were good horsemen, and their mounts were in fair condition ; but there was this against them, that they were cumbersome for a pursuit of this breakneck kind. Pitted against Alphard, they were as hunters against a steeplechaser. But the prize, should they overtake and capture the fugitive ; the disgrace if he succeeded in eluding them, after they had held him literally in their grasp—these thoughts stimu-

lated them to face any danger or fatigue. They clapped spurs to their chargers, managed to scramble through the obstacle anyhow, partly by force of momentum, partly by mere weight, and pounded along in the track of the thoroughbred. On, on, through heavy ploughed land and red clay, across smooth elastic turf and uneven patches of hard soil—on, on, over stone wall and double-bank, here bursting through a gap, there topping a fence intertwined with hurdles, and again plashing through a brook which sent its spray of waters tossing to the very withers, rushed the fleet steed, with the strain of the Arab in his blood. Men, women, and children, as they saw the animal flit by, flung up their hands and cried :

“The daymon horse!—the daymon horse!”

It was soon evident to those behind that Father John's horse was not putting forth his full speed, and could easily get away if he chose, for he frequently stayed in his course and turning, looked at his pursuers and allowed them to gain on him, as if merely playing with them after the manner of a saucy child. These constant stoppages irritated Hinson to a degree, and he found Ned Delaney's instructions of no use, for the horse had entered into the excitement of

the chase, and would only go how and whither willed.

At length Alphard's career was stopped by a white wall which bounded the main road to Knockbeg. Swift and light the spirited creature sprang over the obstruction and dropped like a bird almost in the midst of a party of ladies and gentlemen who were out riding for amusement.

"By Jove," exclaimed one of the cavaliers, "that's the neatest thing I have ever seen."

While the riding party were still occupied in staring after the retreating form of Alphard, who had taken a short turn and proceeded along the road, the four mounted constables came labouring up, evidently in dire difficulties. They dare not attempt the wall, but were quick to discover a gate some hundred yards further. The heavy chargers were foam-covered, and bleeding from the sharp rowels. The three foremost horsemen hastened after Alphard, leaving the fourth to re-fasten the gate. His animal was heaving its sides painfully, and the policeman, who had alighted, stooped to try if there was a stone in the hoof.

"Who are you after?" asked one of the gentlemen.

"James Hinson, sir," was the answer. "And

I can tell you we've had the devil's own chase after him."

"Hinson! That Hinson? Nonsense! You are mistaken. I know Hinson very well myself," said the former speaker, who was our old acquaintance, the Marquis De Vautier.

"He is Hinson, all the same, sir," said the policeman. "He seems different because he is disguised, but I had my hand on him a little while ago, and actually while he was speaking to me he got off."

"You're making a fool of yourself, my man," said De Vautier. "Hinson couldn't ride a mile to save his life. I'd as soon expect to see him astride a clothes horse."

"Well, sir, I can only believe the sight of my own eyes, and if it isn't Hinson, it's his fetch."

So saying, the constable remounted, and rode away.

"Ladies and gentlemen," cried the volatile Marquis, "shall we follow, too? Come, it will be something new to hunt a man."

The riding party cheerfully assented to De Vautier's proposition, and, wheeling round, cantered briskly in the rear of the police.

When Alphard had quitted the mountain for

the fields, Hinson, while still keeping his knees tightly pressed to the animal's sides, raised himself in the stirrups and looked round. Gradually, as his scattered senses returned to him, he felt overcome by an unwonted depression. He had not yet recovered from the effects of his recent struggle with the priest, and now that the first novelty of being borne swiftly along was past, the unusual exercise was telling on him. There could be no longer question of his slipping off the horse's back and trusting to leg-bail; for there could be no chance of escaping that way now. If he could only reach the old Abbey of Tirowen he would be safe. Safe! Could he answer for the movements of the self-willed beast beneath him?

How sublimely ridiculous was his present situation! He, who knew not even the alphabet of the art of riding, was flying like the wind, astride the noblest steed in Ireland. The bare notion of it moved him to laughter, low mocking laughter, for he was laughing not alone at himself, but at the gullibility of the world in general. But when his laughter ceased, his depression deepened. Weakened in body and unstrung in nerve, he let his head droop on his breast, and the reins hang loosely, and for one

moment a superstitious feeling crept over him. Was he no longer master of himself? Had Kennedy, though absent, power even to conquer him through the agency of his demon horse? Kennedy—always Kennedy.

On—on went Alphard, and behind him in irregular file clattered the four mounted constables and the riding party.

The ladies' riding habits (they were worn long then), floated loosely in the breeze, and the soft air of Lusmore moistened their lips and their cheeks; and their arch eyes sparkled as they interchanged light words with their gallant escort. How they all enjoyed it. It was such rare fun chasing a man! Behind them they left the frowning chasm of the Devil's Bit Mountain, the steep-clefted Kyleneamanna, and the dark Killavalla Wood. Above them the blue sky was mottled white with clouds, and below and before them in the hollow lay the little town of Knockbeg.

"Sir," said the foremost policeman to De Vautier, who had ridden abreast of him, "he's making straight for Knockbeg, and we'll nab him there."

"Poor brute!" said the marquis. "He must be well-nigh exhausted by his run. By

Jove, what a matchless rider he is, and what a horse he has under him! How for a moment could you take that man for James Hinson?"

"But, sir, he is Hinson all the same, begging your pardon for contradicting you. By the living——" shouted the constable, rising in his saddle in his excitement. "Look—look! Hinson's turned down the blind boreen, and there's a sinking bog at the end. He can't escape us now. Boys! boys! blood alive! we'll have our man in a jiffy, and the Knockbeg fellows won't be able to crow over us then."

Alphard had, indeed, suddenly arrested his easy gallop, and halted in the middle of the road, and then, making an unexpected wheel to the left, walked leisurely down a narrow lane at the end of which was a broad expanse of wet bog.

Hinson roused himself and made an effort to drag the horse around and force him back to the main road; but Alphard neighed and pawed the ground and refused to be mastered, and at last, as if wearied of his rider's persistent tugging, he twisted his slender neck round, looked at him and made a soft, moaning sound. Hinson shivered slightly and then, sitting quietly, he gathered the reins tighter in his hand and pressing his knees closer and closer to Alphard's sides,

lest the animal might make a start and throw him off, he set himself to ponder on the possibilities of still escaping. He glanced at the bog, over the surface of which a dank mist was rising and exhaling in gray vapours. He knew the country round well, for had he not mapped every hole and corner of it as late as last summer? He remembered how one night he had been nearly lost in this same bottom, and when he had sunk almost to his arm-pits his shouts attracted some peasants, who flung him a rope with a running noose, which he managed to slip over his breast, so that they could haul him out. He glanced at either side of him, but there also the ground was marshy and treacherous; besides, his limbs were cramped from being so long in one position, and it would be useless to attempt to run for his liberty.

What was to be done?

Alphard stood on the brink of the shaking bog, his head inclined towards the entrance of the breen, and his delicate ears erect. Hinson, with his regard now turned in keen watchfulness in the same direction, waited.

In a few moments, with shouts of triumph, the pursuers dashed round the corner.

"I'll be in at the death!" cried De Vautier,

whose horse was fresh, pushing his way in front of them all. But when he had gained a few yards in advance, he pulled up, uttered a hasty exclamation, and drew aside. In spite of alteration, in spite of disguise, he at last recognised Hinson. Those steel-gray, inquiring eyes, looking at him with such meaning from between thickly-puckered, half-closed lids, could belong to no other man. Those eyes were plainly claiming his assistance.

"Make a bolt for it," said the Marquis, in a hurried tone. "I'll help you."

At this instant the foremost constable galloped beside De Vautier, his face glowing with exultation. Reining in, and stretching out his hand, he yelled: "Now, Hinson, I have got you!"

But before he could touch his quarry, Alphard made a buck-jump and lighted several yards on into the bog. Scarcely had he skimmed the surface of the miry peat ground with his hoofs, when up he sprang in the air again, making a series of bounds until he reached the opposite side in safety.

"Follow!—follow!" called out the gentlemen riders from behind.

"Follow!" cried the foremost constable, who had been almost unseated in his endeavour to clutch Hinson, and was now purple with rage

and disappointment. "Follow, indeed! Why, it is the shaking bog of Shalla, and our chargers would sink up to their shoulders in it. D—— him, he and his horse must belong to the devil to get off like that."

From the far side of the bog Hinson raised his hat in courteous parting salute to those from whom he had just escaped, and then was carried swiftly off by his mettlesome steed.

"Hang his impudence!" said the second constable. "He's off to Knockbeg, and will have a quarter of a mile start of us. Let's be after him."

"Let's take a shot at him anyhow," said another constable.

"Steady, my man," interrupted De Vautier, "you're not justified in doing that. I am a magistrate, and if you attempt any man's life without superior orders, you know the penalty."

"Much good firing at him would do," said the man sullenly. "I believe he has a suit of chain armour on."

"Come along, lads," shouted the eldest constable, "we're only losing time."

The whole party returned up the breen to the main road, and then, urging their horses to their utmost speed, hastened towards Knockbeg, De Vautier keeping well ahead with the intention

of aiding Hinson if he saw any opportunity. They soon sighted Alphard and his rider in front ; but it was only for a moment, for the road dipped at this point and man and horse disappeared from their view. In less than three minutes the policemen and their light-hearted accompanying party gained the part of the road where they had lost sight of Hinson. They were just a mile from Knockbeg, and the white houses of the clean little town shone below before them. To their left were the ruins of an ancient abbey, and, to their unconcealed astonishment, outside those ruins stood Alphard, not a hair turned, meek as a lamb, and riderless.

Where was Hinson ?

There was no one visible except a decrepit labourer, who was standing with both hands on a spade-handle.

“Hi ! my man,” cried a constable, seizing Alphard. “Where is the rider of this horse ?”

“Eh ?” said the labourer, with a stupid blink, as he put his hand to his ear. “I’m rather hard of hearin’.”

“Where is Hinson gone ?” shouted the policeman, at the top of his voice.

“The Abbey of Tirowen, sure enough, it is. Spake louder, av ye plaze.”

“Oh! bother the fool,” said another of the constables. “Two of us had better go and search the ruins, and the rest can remain on the watch outside. Don’t lose sight of that spalpeen.”

De Vautier alighted, and flinging his reins to his groom, followed the constables into the abbey.

Inside they saw nothing but masses of fallen stone, overgrown with moss and rank weeds; low, broad doorways, and high, narrow window-frames, and portions of decaying walls, with noisome, slimy vermin crawling over their oozy green surfaces. Up and down the policemen went, spying into every cranny, but at length they were forced to give up their fruitless search. There was no trace of Hinson anywhere. Crest-fallen, the two constables returned to the open air, accompanied by De Vautier, whose countenance was radiant with mischievous amusement. The sprightly Marquis mounted and cried to his friends: “Ladies and gentlemen, the fox has run to earth. Let us get home to dinner.”

With as much careless indifference as they had joined in the pursuit, the riding party wended their way homewards, chatting about their adventure, and making very merry over the discomfiture of the police. The four con-

stables gathered in consultation outside the ruined abbey. What was to be done next? Hinson must be hidden somewhere, not far off. But where? They looked for the deaf old labourer, but he had disappeared.

"To think," said one of the constables, still harping on the same string, "that I should actually have my hand on Hinson, and that he should manage to give me the slip after all. I don't care what you Lusmore fellows decide to do; but if my comrade is willing to join me, I'll not go back to barracks until I ferret him out—no, not if I were to stop out all night by this curse o' God abbey."

"At any rate," said his comrade, "we've got his horse."

With this, the speaker tried to shorten the reins lying loosely on Alphard's neck; but the graceful animal, which had been standing quietly by, proudly resented the familiarity. Shaking himself free before they could attempt to stop his progress, he fled back towards Lusmore.

"Leave the animal alone. Where is the use of bothering about it? We'll get laughed at enough without arresting a horse. D——Hinson! he must be in tow with Satan to hide himself in this barren spot, of all places."

There was some amount of plausibility in the policeman's remark, for the part of the country they were in was very bleak compared to that which they had left behind. The river gurgled and sobbed as it coursed at the back of the venerable abbey ; but, except for the rank vegetation in and about the ruins, there was not a single bush, or tree, or ditch in the immediate vicinity in the shelter of which a man could bestow himself.

The four constables remained in the neighbourhood until after nightfall ; but, notwithstanding their vigilance, they saw nothing more of Hinson.

Ten days later the owner of Mount Farm received a letter bearing an English post-mark. The letter was written in cypher, and the address at the end of it was :

PRIVATE GREEN,
Of the —th Foot,
Infantry Barracks, Chatham.

“ Well,” said Ned Delaney to himself, as he gazed at the signature with unfeigned admiration, “ that bangs Banagher ! Who but the ‘ master ’ would have thought of enlisting as a soldier in the enemy’s camp ? ”

Part V.—The Lifting of the Cloud.

I could scale the blue air,
I could plough the high hills,
Oh, I could kneel all night in prayer
To heal your many ills !
And one . . . beamy smile from you
Would float like light between
My toils and me, my own, my true,
My Dark Rosaleen !
My fond Rosaleen !
Would give me life and soul anew,
A second life, a soul anew,
My Dark Rosaleen !

CHAPTER I.

HOME AGAIN.

HINSON's flight and escape on Alphard caused a great sensation throughout Knockbeg and the surrounding districts. It threatened to become as legendary as Turpin's ride to York. *The Avenger* office was constantly crowded by people wanting to hear all particulars, and O'Brady, only too ready to oblige his fellow-townsmen, adorned the columns of his newspaper and fed their appetites with thrilling descriptions of "The Master's Hegira," as he phrased it; and if Peter drew on his lively imagination for his facts, his readers were none the less pleased. The Abbey of Tirowen became a point of attraction for excursions, and venturous youths explored in vain for the entrance to the subterranean passage said to exist,

and which ran underneath the ruins as far as the venerable Castle of Knockbeg, and through the windings of which Hinson was supposed to have evaded the vigilance of his pursuers. To dive into that gruesome tunnel, which was popularly supposed to be dark, slimy, narrow, and weed-o'ergrown, if not paved with bones, required no common courage ; but, then, Hinson was no common man. Had he not walked out of the strongest of jails, as if he had the keys of the doors in his pockets ; had he not cast back two of the most powerful men of the mounted police as if they were stricken by a fairy blast ; had he not caught the bullets they had fired at him in his hand, just like the Wizard of the North ; and had he not ridden the demon-horse that none but two other men had ever dared to back, and ridden it as if he were part and parcel of it ?

A proclamation was issued from Dublin Castle, trebling the reward for the apprehension of the Head of the Brotherhood of the Mystic Star. All the ports in the kingdom were watched, and while the authorities sought him far and near, they never once connected Hinson's identity with that of Private Green, or the —th Foot, Chatham Barracks, who deserted three months after enlistment.

The priest of Lusmore looked so haggard and weird and wan, that no one was astonished when he made arrangements to leave his parish for a couple of years, and seek renewed health and strength in the warmer clime of Italy, beneath the roof of his genial and clever friend, Doctor Pinti. The Sunday before Father John Kennedy's departure he addressed a few farewell words to his parishioners, and, like most strong deeply-rooted natures, he could not help feeling a pang at the temporary rending of ties which had more or less galled him hitherto. There was something mournful in the brief simple way in which he told his flock how he left them under the charge of Father Terence Delaney, whom they had all known and respected from his boyhood, and than whom there was no man more worthy of their confidence.

The following day Father John set out for Genoa, accompanied by his niece and Sally Breen. Peter O'Brady escorted them as far as Dublin, and would have gone the whole way had not the priest put his veto on anything of the kind.

"Well, sir," said O'Brady, "I give in to you; but if you want me any hour of the day or night send to me and I'll leave *The Avenger* to look after itself, and be with you as fast as sea and land can carry me."

“Arrah ! Misther Pether, me darlint,” cried Sally, with a tear in her rough voice, “bud sure we’ll always be afther wantin’ ye.”

Nearly three years have run their course since Father John Kennedy left Lusmore, and now he is on his way back, better in health of mind and body than he had been for many a long day. The pure air of the Riviera di Levante ; the cheery life on the eminence canopied by a sky of matchless blue, only to be approached by the blue—deeper, but not more transparent—of the tideless sea ; the delicious aspects of nature in every season ; the perpetual enlivenment of the harbour ; the various objects of interest in stately church, rich picture-gallery, and luxurious garden ; the frank and captivating Italian society, and, above all, the ever-present care of his immediate circle—contributed to restore the intellect of the priest to its clearness, his frame to some of its former strength, and his spirits to a healthier balance. Doctor Pinti did not part with him until he had effectually eradicated the seeds of the brain malady which had clouded his patient’s latter life. When his cure was completed, Father John felt himself to be a new man, and with clarified blood and recruited

hopefulness he set forward on his homeward journey.

Some few changes had taken place in his parish during his absence.

Emily Neville was now her cousin Richard's wife, and alternately teased or bewitched him, much after the manner she had practised when he was only her suitor.

Ned Delaney, in spite of all his former protestations, had succumbed to Father Rody Toole's influence, and has actually fallen in love, and was about to bring home a bride to Drumbawn, to the chagrin of some of the marriageable girls of Lusmore.

The Brotherhood of the Mystic Star had apparently remained inactive after their abortive attempt at insurrection.

Hinson had been twice to Genoa.

On his first visit he came across Kennedy, who was amusing himself by watching the people busy at work in the harbour. Hinson, doubtful of the reception he was likely to receive from the priest, kept in the background; but Kennedy, suddenly turning round, saw him, and, quickly advancing, welcomed him, and invited him home to his friend's house; thus showing that, for the time being, at least, he meant to

ignore all past unpleasantness. But though the priest twitted the "master" about his runaway ride on Alphard, and strove to draw him out on the future movements of his organisation, Hinson warily avoided committing himself to anything but the vaguest statements as to his intentions. During both visits Father John seemed strangely suspicious of the change in Hinson's manner towards his niece, and was so watchful in consequence that the "master" could find no opportunity of speaking alone with the young girl.

William Clarke, whose health at the best had always been delicate, became seriously ill in prison ; indeed, so much so that the Government offered him his freedom if he would engage to leave Ireland for ever ; but he fiercely refused to enter into any compromise with the " emissaries of the enemy," as he styled them. The executive was then pondering the advisability of releasing him unconditionally, when he saved them further trouble on this head by escaping—thanks to his own determined courage and the devotedness of a friend, who, continually on the watch for an opportunity to help him to his liberty, grasped quickly and astutely at one when it arose.

In the valley things had gone on much as in former times. Though the murder of the Rector still remained fresh in the people's memories, all effort to discover who had committed the foul deed had been given up, and seed was sown and corn reaped, cattle bought and sold, and weddings and wakes celebrated in precisely the same fashion as they had been before the soil of the fairest vale in Munster was stained by the blood of Adam Glover.

The village gossips regaled themselves with choice bits of scandal about the "goings-on" of Squire Neville's young wife, or shook their heads as they talked over the unseemly squabbles, now so frequent, between Kate Mahon and her son, whenever the latter visited Lusmore. The ex-schoolmaster had waxed morose of late.

He strongly suspected, now that he was no longer of any use to them, that the Castle authorities meant to shelve him. Curse the Brotherhood of the Mystic Star! Why didn't they make some move, or how was a fellow to earn his living? And now, in Pat's brain, a scheme began slowly to shape itself. Why should not ammunition be found in the house of a rebel whom the loyal Mahon would discover to the police?

This, however, might be both expensive and risky. He would think it over.

Bride Killeen returned to Ireland, her thoughts occupied with a single idea, to the exclusion of all else ; all the energies of mind and body concentrated on the attainment of one object—the elucidation of the mystery of Adam Glover's death.

Cut off from the sympathy of her uncle, unskilled in the language, and apparently forgotten by her lover, the young girl had led a very lonely life in Italy. She had written from Genoa to Gerald Moore, but had received no reply ; and, all along, Father John had treated her as a stranger, and never addressed a word to her except when it was absolutely necessary. The priest's implacability caused her great distress of mind. Would he never forgive her for the horrid but natural mistake she made in suspecting that, when his poor brain was distraught, he might unwittingly have killed his friend ? One day, at Doctor Pinti's, Kennedy appeared so animated, and his glance occasionally fell on his niece with such a wistful show of the old feeling, that she was encouraged to make an attempt to be restored to his favour. When the cheery

doctor left them alone, she flung herself on her uncle's neck, and begged him to be friends again, as in the time past. For one fleeting moment she thought he relented; but his countenance clouded over again, and, repulsing her, he said sternly :

“Did you ever know me to break my word? I solemnly tell you, once again, that I cannot and may not forgive you until you have found the destroyer of my friend. Never.”

Those words kept ringing in her ears long after they were uttered. From that day forward she was anxious to get back to Ireland, and at nights used to dream that she was on her knees in some dark place searching and following a voice which called to her incessantly, “Here! Here! In Lusmore.”

They had already been a week settled at the chapel-house before Bride had formed any plan as to how she should pursue her quest. At first she thought of taking the editor of *The Avenger* into her confidence; but believing that he would try to dissuade her, she resolved to work alone.

One charming afternoon, when O'Brady was diverting Father John with some story, Bride, restless and depressed, left them with the intention of passing an hour at the Castle with Emily

Neville. The walk through the picturesque avenue, combined with the freshness of the air, braced up the girl, strengthened her nerves, and made her feel altogether more hopeful than she had been since her return. For half-an-hour Bride and Emily had been chatting merrily, the former seated on an ottoman at Emily's feet in a position more easy than graceful. At length Emily remarks :

"Bride, there is something wrong with you."

"Wrong, dear! Why should you think so?"

Emily perked her pretty blonde head sideways critically, and then said :

"As long as you are talking or listening, your face is quite natural; but directly you begin to think, you have such an odd expression."

"Odd!"

"Yes, odd, you dear old stupid thing. Odd, odd—look!"

Here Emily closed her rosebud lips and gave such a grotesque brooding expression to herself, that Bride could not help laughing at the caricature.

"If I look at all like that, it must be very funny to watch me."

"Not a bit funny. On the contrary, most tragical. One would believe you were thinking of a murder."

A murder ! Unconscious Emily has carelessly stumbled on the very Frankenstein of her friend's hourly thoughts.

Bride rises hastily and prepares to go. She cannot stand the scrutiny of those sharp eyes much longer.

"So soon !" cried Emily. "Why, you have been with me for such a little while."

Bride parts the feathery curls on her friend's brow, and gazes admiringly at her delicately-pencilled blue-and-violet veins. Then, kissing her, she says :

"Dear, you are even prettier than you used to be ; but I must leave you now, for I promised Mrs. Fogarty to take tea with her this afternoon."

"Well, Bride, I will let you go, since you must ; but you will come soon again. I have such a lot to tell you. And you must make haste and get rid of those two tiny lines of care in the middle of your forehead, or you will look an elderly woman before your time."

"I am quite proud of my wrinkles," retorts Bride. "Dr. Pinti maintains that the lines of a face make or mar the expression."

"Nonsense ! Your doctor is a goose, and knows nothing. Wait till we have some nice beaux to introduce to you."

Bride smiled and shook her hand.

As she went towards the door Emily followed her, and detaining her, looked at her straight in the eyes, and said :

"You are striving to hide something from me. What is it ?"

"What should it be ?" was the quiet reply.

"You are not in love, are you ? In love with the President of the new Irish Republic ?" asked Emily.

"The President of the Irish Republic ?"

"Yes, the man who gets himself up like the busts of Shakespeare."

"Mr. Hinson !" exclaimed Bride. "He does not care for me."

"Oh !" said Emily, "there are some people who think differently ; Mrs. Fogarty for instance."

Bride smiled and shook her head.

"Ah, dear Providence !" mused the young girl, as she left the Castle, "how amazed Emily would be, could she but fathom what is now the one aim of my life !"

CHAPTER II.

THE CREST OF KYLENAMANNA.

THE inhabitants of Lusmore soon began to whisper among themselves that there was something very strange about Bride Killeen, and noticed that her manners and ways were different to what they had been before she went abroad.

For days together, the girl would wander through the wood and on to the top of Kylene-manna, always absorbed in the one thought of how she was to discover the Rector's murder? At times she would give vent to a pitiful sob, and her eyes would be blinded with tears as she recalled the mildness and kindliness of the voice and smile which were never more to greet her on this side of the grave. Who had stolen her uncle's Cuban dagger from the mantelpiece of the chapel-house, and what had become of

the Rector's ring? Then, there was the letter which the gentle pastor had in his pocket on the day of his death and which never had been found. What were the contents of this letter, or could it be of such vital importance to anyone to have it destroyed that even murder was not hesitated at as a means of gaining possession of it?

There were times when Bride avoided the mountain and the wood, and, remaining in the valley, mixed with the villagers and listened to their conversation and scrutinised their faces. Surely, some amongst them must know of this thing, if they only dared speak.

The majority of the Celts and the Palatines had been, and were, perhaps, still members of the Brotherhood of the Mystic Star, and on the very day of the murder, after she had given them the alarm in the hut in the gorge, they must, in dispersing, have met the assassin and his victim in the Pass of Kyleneamanna.

Once the idea took possession of her that some of the inhabitants of the valley must be acquainted with the identity of the murderer, and had screened him because of his connection with the Brotherhood, she could no longer rest indoors. Kate Mahon's shop was the general

rendezvous after work hours for the gossips of the place, and thither every day, on some pretext or other, Bride Killeen found her way, and instead of going straight into the parlour, as had been her wont when business brought her to the village inn, she would remain in the shop and hear all that was said. At length the frequent calls of the priest's niece began first to surprise and then to nettle Kate Mahon more than she cared to acknowledge. As the hour approached for Bride's coming, the postmistress would take her position at the shop window giving on the road. One afternoon she was stationed there while two farmers were conversing and drinking in the shop.

"What a queer way Father John's niece has of staring at us!" remarked one of the farmers, who had his elbows on the counter and a pot of porter beside him.

"True for you, that she has," said the other, who, seated on a bench, was occupied in filling his pipe. "Miss Bride's eyes grow bigger and bluer every day, and she seems to listen with them instead of her ears. Faix, Mrs. Mahon," said he, "but she has got mighty fond of you lately. She can't pass a day without coming to see you."

The postmistress muttered a few words and retired into the parlour, shutting the door. The farmers nudged each other, and one of them put his hand to his mouth in imitation of a man who tosses something agreeable down his throat.

"She is at the blue-ruin* again," he whispered. "It will kill her one of these days."

"The more's the pity," said his companion. "She's a fine figure of a woman yet, and has a snug bit of money put away. I had half a mind to make up to her myself, before she took to the drink. It is a lone thing to be a widower with a couple of youngsters, and no one to mind them. But Kate's temper is awful lately. She has never been the same since Clarke was taken."

"I don't see how that could have anything to do with her temper; besides, he is safe enough over the water now."

The other farmer shook his head knowingly. Glancing cautiously round, he stooped towards his neighbour, and said in a low tone :

"I can tell you something you don't know : Clarke is *not* in America. He was in Dublin last week, and so was the 'master.'"

"You don't mean it !"

* Blue-ruin, popular name for whisky adulterated with blue vitriol.

"It's a fact. Ned Delaney told me, and he said that the 'master' sent us word that we were all to be in readiness to meet him one of these nights at the old spot."

"Ay—ay. Did Delaney tell you it was true that Kate got Clarke out of prison?"

"Well, he said nothing about it; but I shouldn't wonder. For she has a friend in Dublin, and I've heard that she sent him money for some purpose or other, and she always did think a heap of Clarke. She'd do anything for the Cause. It's a pity she has given herself up so to the drink. Now guess what business the 'master' is on?"

"We're not going to have another rising, are we?"

"No—not yet, at any rate. But the 'master' has found out something about the informer who sold us the last time. Hoolahan — Michael Hoolahan; and they say he comes from here. This day fortnight we're to have a midnight meeting at Mount Farm, and the sentence is to be passed on him, and one of us will be told off to execute the 'master's' orders."

"Faix! I wouldn't be in Hoolahan's shoes for a trifle. Hoolahan — Hoolahan! I never heard tell of anyone in the valley of that name."

"Nor I either. Chut! Here comes Kate. Not a word before her, for the world. The 'master' will be here after next week, and then we'll know who Hoolahan is."

The men relapsed into their former careless lounge as the postmistress flung the parlour-door open. Her face was flushed and she staggered slightly, and to steady herself leaned against the jamb of the door.

At this instant, Bride Killeen entered the shop.

The young girl was paler than usual. She saluted the men and looked towards the woman.

"Good evening," said she. "Mrs. Mahon, give me a dozen of stamps, if you please."

There was a smouldering fire in the postmistress's eyes as she remarked in an insolent tone :

"Another dozen of stamps! That is four dozen already this week."

"I beg your pardon. What did you say?" asked Bride.

"I say," said the woman, more insolently than before, and not altering her position against the jamb; "I say, Miss Killeen, that you must write a lot of letters to want so many stamps."

There was a moment's silence, and the men winked at each other.

"Mrs. Mahon," said Bride very quietly, "you forget yourself. Your business is to serve your customers and not to make remarks about what does not concern you."

The postmistress glowered at the speaker, but there was something in the straight, clear look of the girl's eyes which brought the woman to her senses, semi-intoxicated though she was. Propping herself as well as she was able, she moved towards the desk behind the counter, where the stamps were.

"Forgive me," said she. "I have not been well lately, and half my time I don't know what I am saying, my head aches so."

"I am very sorry for you," said the girl, as she took the stamps. "I noticed a great change in you directly I returned from Italy. You work too hard. We have no visitors at the chapel-house at present, and if you would like to have Sally Breen over for a couple of hours every day to help in the shop or the house, I am sure she would be glad to come."

"I won't have Sall-o'-the-Wig spying about here," cried the woman sharply. Then she added in a more gracious tone: "I am much

obliged to you all the same, Miss Killeen, but I am well able to do my own work still."

The girl lingered, as if she would fain say more. At length, after merely wishing the farmers and the women a "good evening," she left the shop. She had hardly gone a step or two up the road when she turned, and, re-entering, walked straight up to the farmer who was seated on the bench, and accosted him :

"Denis Ryan, when I was a child you were very good and kind to me."

The man jumped up hastily, letting his pipe fall to the ground. He was just striking a match to light it when he was startled by the unexpected return of Father John's niece.

"Well, Miss Bride," said he, "we were all very fond of you."

Two hectic spots burned in the girl's cheeks, and lines of determination gathered about her lips.

"Denis," she went on, "I remember when I was very tiny indeed you used to show me how the bees got into the yellow blossoms of the gorse in Killavalla."

"Ay—ay—Miss Bride," said the farmer in confusion. "What a memory you have !"

It was so pleasant to have this beautiful girl

putting him in mind of what he used to do for her. "Yes," he added, "and you were so cute, and when I hid a flower from you, just for fun, you always found out where it was, in the long run. Though a mere baby, you were as sharp as needles, and that persevering, there was no trying to get you to give up a thing once you'd set your mind on it."

The hectic spots deepened on Bride's cheeks, and the curve of her lips grew firmer.

"Yes," said she, "I am just like that now also. No matter how well hidden a thing is I am sure to find out all about it. But I will not have to search much longer, for *you* will help me. Will you not?"

The man scratched his head.

"Help you, miss! That I will with all my heart; but how?"

The girl glanced round her. As yet no fresh customers had dropped in to the village inn. The other farmer's curiosity was excited to the highest pitch by the demand Father John's niece made to his comrade. What could she be driving at? At the portion of the shop devoted to the postal department, Kate Mahon was in a chair, with her head drooped upon the desk, as if dozing to sleep.

"Some one of you must know," said Bride—"some one of you must have seen him and have screened him from the beginning."

"Know who? Screened who?" exclaimed Denis Ryan.

"The man who murdered Mr. Glover."

"God save us!" cried both farmers in one breath.

The postmistress jerked her head off the desk and rose upright. The drunken flush faded from her countenance and her gaze turned on the young girl, whose last words had come upon her like a douche of cold water, and had sobered her at once. Notwithstanding Kate Mahon's fatal indulgence in the poisonous liquor, which was fast undermining both brain and body, there was still much of the Palatine doggedness and self-control within her, and when the occasion arose she had power enough to subdue the fumes of the blue-stone whisky and act and think in a determined manner.

Bride was too much engrossed in her desire to extract information from the man to pay any heed to the postmistress's movements. The girl's bearing was expressive of the most thorough earnestness, and her voice was beseeching in its entreaty as she spoke again.

"Denis, you were in the hut the day Mr. Glover met his death. I saw you there. You went home through the Pass of Kylenamanna. You must have seen the Rector and—and the man who killed him. Oh, why do you hide this, all of you? It must come out some day."

"God save us and bless us, Miss Bride," said the farmer, "but you have most made my heart come into my mouth. True for you, I was in the hut, but we didn't go through the Pass of Kylenamanna at all; and neither myself nor those who were with me met Mr. Glover nor anybody else until we got on to the high road. It is heaven's truth I tell you," he added, as the girl looked incredulous, "and I don't believe there is a man in Lusmore who wouldn't give up the villain if he knew him."

"Someone in the valley must know," she persisted.

"Now, Miss Bride, take a friend's advice and don't try to rake up what's past and gone. It is not fit for a young lady like you to be talking of such things. Leave that to men. It is their work, not yours."

"Denis," said she, "you remember the fable

you used to repeat so often to me when I was a child, the fable of the lark and her young ones? Well, for the future, I will ask no one's help. I will depend on myself."

Thus speaking, she left the shop, and the postmistress glared at her until she disappeared.

"Bless me," exclaimed Ryan, "but Miss Bride did give me a start. What put Mr. Glover's murder into her head after these years? And she is exactly the same as she was when a child. Once set her mind on a thing, there was no coaxing nor frightening her from it."

"It is strange," said the other farmer, as he drank his porter, "but then Father John's niece was brought up different to most girls. For all her soft ways, there is something masterful about her."

"Masterful!" cried Kate Mahon with a harsh unnatural laugh. "Masterful! Bride Killeen is mad. How could *she* ever find out?"

For several days afterwards Bride avoided the village and resumed her solitary rambles to the summit of Kylenamanna.

One lovely summer's afternoon she emerged

from the depths of the wood and proceeded with light steps up to the crest of the hill. The air was deliciously pure and bracing on this elevated plateau ; and the young girl, at once invigorated and soothed by it, forgot the dread task she had set herself, and revelled simply in the beauty of the landscape, and felt glad for the gift of her bounding life.

Below her, nature's panorama unrolled itself in variegated undulations. To the left shone the turrets of Castle Neville and the glassy lake, and there also wound the long avenue-road, with its time-honoured oaks and elms. In the hollow to the right lay Baltore, with its background of hills covered with furze, and dotted over with sheep. Above her the gray-blue sky was flecked with soft white clouds, and beneath the purple blossoms of the heather clustered round her feet.

A rapid step comes up the hill behind her. A strange presentiment shakes her being, she turns and beholds Gerald Moore !

For a moment the young man was transfixed at the sight of the girl ; but, soon recovering, his dark face lit up, and bounding towards her, he stretched out his hands and cried :

“ Bride, you here ! My own love ! At last—at last ! ”

With a low, glad cry, she flew to his breast, and as his arms closed round her, she said :

“Is it indeed you, Gerald?”

There was no need for question or explanation. They knew they loved each other.

Thus the barriers reared by misunderstanding and absence were broken down by a single impulse of nature. Heart to heart on the mountain top, what were the cares and sorrows of the past, what was all the world to them now? Were they not once more together?

After a moment, the girl softly extricated herself from her lover's embrace, and her upturned face was tremulous with tenderness as she spoke :

“I have been so lonely, Gerald ; so lonely.”

“Lonely!” he repeated. “Lonely! And I?”

Taking her head between his hands and bending it back, he looked into her eyes.

“Bride,” said he, in impassioned tones, “I dreamt I saw you here on the crest of Kylene-manna, and that you told me you loved me. Across the wide Atlantic I have come to you. Tell me, darling, it was not all a dream! Tell me you love me!”

“I have loved you all through, Gerald,” was

her reply; "but I thought you didn't care for me any more, since you never answered my letters."

"Letters—letters? I got no letters. If I had received a single line from you, nothing would have kept me from you. If I had been chained, dying in a dungeon, I would have found a way to reach you. My love, my beautiful one, how I have hungered for a sight of your dear face. Is it all a dream? Am I here on the crest of Kylenamanna, are your eyes looking into mine?"

"It is no dream, Gerald, and I love you."

"Oh!" said he, "how often in shooting the rapids in my canoe have I seen your form flit before me. How often, when other women have smiled upon me, have your features glided in fancy between them and me, and how I have ached with a longing to be near you—to touch you! Oh! my beloved, did ever man love woman as I love you?"

She was silent, and while his heart beat rapidly and his soul was surging with tumultuous thoughts and desires, so that he felt that the world was too small to contain him, she was tranquil and at rest. His arms were around her, her head against his breast, her limpid eyes

turned to him. The mountain breeze played about them, lifting the dark locks of the young man, and fanning the girl's face with wooing motion.

"Dearest," cried Gerald, as he drew her closer to him, "tell me how you care for me, tell me how you love me. Speak to me. There is no music to me like the sound of your voice."

She smiled sweetly up at him.

Entranced by her eyes and her smile, he stooped his head and pressed his lips to hers.

CHAPTER III.

RESURGAM.

ABOUT a fortnight after Bride Killeen had met Gerald Moore, the Reverend John Kennedy was alone at midnight in the parlour of the chapel-house. The priest was unusually restless, and paced to and fro with agitated steps. It was a beautiful moonlight night. The front window was open and the heavy curtains were flung back so as to reveal the lawn beyond. At length the priest arrested his steps and listened until the stillness was broken by the sound of approaching wheels.

Father John hastened to the porch to welcome the guests he had been so impatiently expecting. A car drove up, on which were two men besides the driver. Those men wore thick mufflers around the lower parts of their faces and had on

slouched hats. Their anxiety to conceal their identity was so evident that, had it been daylight instead of moonlight, they could not have failed to attract the very notice they wished to avoid. Both alighted, and one of them, before advancing to meet the priest, whispered to the driver :

“Go straight to Delaney’s of the Mount. We will be there between two and three o’clock in the morning.”

The driver nodded assent, and then turning round his horse, returned up the avenue.

“You are late,” said Father John to the foremost man ; “I had almost given you up for to-night.”

“We were obliged to be cautious,” said Hinson, for it was he. “It had got abroad that we were in Ireland, and I had to send over to America to one of my friends who resembles me and ask him to go about New York in my name, so as to put the authorities at the Castle off the scent.”

“Well done, James,” said the priest, “you were ever ready with some artifice or other. I have provided against a surprise. Sally Breen is on sentinel outside the front gate, and will keep watch there until you leave. Since your last visit a high wall has been built round the chapel-

yard, and as the gates are securely fastened, there is no possibility of anyone reconnoitring us from that side."

The second man, who had stood apart, now drew nearer Father John, and took off his muffler and slouched hat. The moon's rays shone on the pallid face and raven hair of Clarke.

"Kennedy," said he, "you have sent for me, or I would not have come. The last time I saw you, I said I would never cross your threshold——"

"Nonsense, William," interrupted the priest, as he warmly grasped the other's hand. "Let bygones be bygones. You are a thousand times welcome to my home."

The pressure of the lean sinewy hand sent a thrill through the sensitive nature of Clarke, and made him fall once more under the influence of the magnetic spell which Kennedy always exercised over those he chose to draw within the inner circle of his intimacy.

"I have never been able to resist you, Kennedy, and I will not try to do so now. But, oh!" he added, as a wave of passionate emotion passed across his face, "if you would only——" Here he ceased, and raised his shining eyes entreatingly to those of the priest.

“Well, well,” said Father John, “perhaps I may even be able to gratify you in that matter. Let us get indoors. Come, James.”

Clarke and the priest entered the house. Hinson lingered behind an instant. Over his left arm he carried a loose gray dust-coat, which was thus worn to conceal a rather bulky parcel. As soon as his friends were out of sight, he cautiously deposited this coat, with its contents, underneath a geranium-stand in the darkest corner of the porch. Then, with a noiseless step, he went into the parlour, and glided almost mechanically into the low seat in the embrasure of the window.

Clarke had already flung himself on the sofa, and now, as the light of the lamp fell on him, he looked more fragile, and his eyes gleamed more vividly than of old.

Father John stood an instant by the table deliberating. Then he glanced towards the occupant of the seat within the window. Hinson raising his head at this moment, the eyes of both men met and they started, and the priest even shuddered, for the same thought rushed simultaneously to their minds. They remembered the struggle which took place between them the last time they were alone together in this room.

Kennedy winced at the recollection of his brain-trouble, but soon the proud spirit crushed back all feeling of morbid sentimentality, and the regard that for a brief period had grown dim from mental agony now shone bright and hopeful once more.

"Thank God," said he, in a cheerful tone, "all that is over for ever. Henceforth I cast my selfish sufferings behind me and devote my life to the benefit of others."

Hinson smiled, shrugged his shoulders, and gazed out on the moonlit lawn. When he turned his face again towards the priest, the latter was busy unlocking the door of the wine-cupboard in the corner.

"I have still a bottle left of that Hungarian wine you partook of one summer's night some four years ago," said Father John. "While we drink it, I will unfold my purpose in sending for you two."

Kennedy took out the delicate ruby glasses with the golden vine-leaf pattern and placed them on the table. Then uncorking a long graceful-necked bottle he poured out the wine, and, as on a former occasion, the clear, amber liquid shimmered, and beaded, and danced like a thing of life.

Hinson watched the priest's movements with a vague sense of uneasiness. There was something new in the expression of Kennedy's eye and mouth. What could it portend?

Father John, though not looking, was fully aware of the furtive scrutiny of which he was the object. Smiling quietly to himself, he sat down in his usual chair.

"William," said he turning to Clarke, who lay behind him on the sofa, "drink. The wine will refresh you. You look weary."

"Weary," cried Clarke, as his face lit with a glow; "no, Kennedy, I am not weary. Your words have wakened in me a new life—life that wine could never give."

The priest made no answer to this. Resting his elbow on the table, he dropped his chin on his hand, and, gazing out at the night, he lost himself in thought. Suddenly turning he fixed his eyes on Hinson, and said:

"What about your organisation? Has it collapsed altogether?"

Startled by this direct question, Hinson hesitated before answering:

"No—not exactly."

"Then what is to be your next move?"

"That must depend on circumstances," was

the slow, quiet reply. Hinson had recovered from his momentary surprise, and was now on his guard.

"Circumstances," repeated Kennedy. Then rising to his feet, he walked quickly up and down the room, and Clarke's eyes followed him with an intense earnestness. Presently Father John spoke again :

"This must be put a stop to at once and for ever," said he.

"I do not understand," dropped slowly and lazily from Hinson's lips.

"Not understand?" was the impatient exclamation. "Then you are not so clever as you used to be. Come," he continued, "let us be honest with one another. This secret organisation of yours must be put an end to. It tends to no ultimate good, and will drag Ireland deeper in the mire than ever."

Instead of answering, Hinson drew his chair from the window to the table, and taking up the glass of wine placed for him, looked through it and the light as if admiring its colour. Touching the surface of the liquid slightly with his lips, he set down the glass again, but made no attempt to speak. Clarke, whose ardent glance had been rapidly darting from one to the other of his friends, now raised himself, and cried :

"What do you want us to do, Kennedy? Are we to remain inactive? Oh, God! You have not deluded us with a false hope? You will do something for the Cause?"

The priest mused a moment.

"I have not deceived you," said he. "There has been, and is, deep and foul wrong, and it is my present intention to make an effort to grapple with this wrong."

"Oh, Kennedy!" exclaimed Clarke, "with you to lead and inspire us, what may we not hope for Ireland!"

At these words Hinson gave one keen look at the priest, whose face was turned sideways towards the occupant of the sofa.

"You mistake me, William," said Father John. "I do not join any party. I must act alone and independently."

"Then *you* are to be the coming man?" drawled Hinson, as he repeated the priest's words to himself on a former occasion.

Father John glanced round at the speaker, slightly raised his shaggy gray eyebrows, and his gesture and look were so pregnant with sarcastic meaning that Hinson shrank into himself, abashed at all Kennedy felt but scorned to say.

Clarke sprang from the sofa, and laying his hand on the priest's shoulder, said, in a tone of much emotion :

"Join us or join us not, what matters it, provided you work for the Cause?"

"What faith you have in me, William!"

So saying, Father John rose and went to the mantelpiece. Leaning his arm carelessly on the shelf, he faced round.

"Frankly," said he, after a moment's pause, "I have brought you two here to give you warning that I intend stamping out your secret organisation."

"Oh, God!" shrilly cried Clarke, "are you also leagued with our enemy?"

"Allow him to proceed," said Hinson with a cold sneer. "If he drag us down, surely he must mean to set up something better in our stead."

"Drag you down?" was the grim rejoinder. "No, I shall leave that to your present followers, who may master you in the future."

"I do not understand."

"Has your cool, cautious brain never looked forward to the possibility that in teaching those peasants the trick of secret organisation, they might one day read your lessons in a way not originally intended by you?"

“How?”

Before replying to this interrogatory, Father John took a rapid survey of the high, narrow, white brow, small regular features, and delicate, tapering fingers of Hinson.

“Surely,” remarked the priest, “you could not expect men of rude passions and uncultured instincts to be troubled with any nice scruples as to the methods employed to gain their ends?”

“The men you speak of,” passionately interposed Clarke, “have burning within them the purest and strongest of all fires—the unquenchable love of country. Ay, and poor and uncultured as they may be, the lowliest amongst them would not hesitate to sacrifice his life for the Cause.”

“I do not doubt it,” was the calm reply. “I merely wish to apply this flame to some tangible purpose, instead of having it spent in woful waste as it has been hitherto.”

Hinson, who, with head drooped forward on his breast, had been listening and weighing every syllable that fell from the priest’s lips, now looked up, and a faint smile hovered over his face as he spoke :

“Words are all very fine, Kennedy, but what do you mean to do?”

“To teach the people to be more self-reliant and less whining. To show them how to husband their strength and vitality until the time shall come to make use of both to their substantial gain.”

Hinson sneered incredulously, but kept silent.

“Listen,” went on Father John, “four years since I spoke to you despondingly of the fact of the Irish being like the Jews, scattered over the face of the globe. Now I tell you that I believe this very dispersion may ultimately prove the main-spring to the attainment of something great for our race in the future.”

• Here he paused and glanced towards the embrasure of the window where Hinson had withdrawn again, but had altered his position so as to hide his face from view, and was apparently bent on studying the pattern of the carpet.

On the other hand Clarke’s dark shining eyes were fixed on the priest, and now he exclaimed :

“Kennedy, I know you now. Your face is all aglow like it used to be in those bygone days, when your fiery eloquence woke to life all that was sleeping in our hearts. When *you* say there is hope for Ireland, there must be indeed hope.”

Father John resumed his seat at the table.

"Do not believe too much in me, William," said he, in an uneasy tone, as an expression of weakness and pain shot across his countenance. "You make me feel what a poor frail mortal I am."

At this moment he was seized with a violent fit of coughing. The paroxysm was so severe that both lookers-on hastened to his assistance. When the cough ceased, Hinson held a glass of wine to the priest's lips.

Something in the expression of the face bent over him amused Kennedy, for his eyes flashed, and he laughed.

"No, not yet, James," said he, as if in answer to the other's secret thought. "I am not going to leave the path clear for you yet awhile."

"I hope your life may be spared for a long time," said Hinson, quietly.

There was a moment's pause, and both men looked at each other.

"Come," said the priest, at length, "give up this secret organisation."

"I cannot and will not."

"Then," said Father John, sternly, "there is to be war between us? "

"Even so," was the imperturbable answer.

Before Clarke, who was much distressed at this passage of words between his friends, could

interpose, Hinson went towards the door. At this movement, the priest rose rapidly to his feet and called out :

“Where are you going?”

Hinson turned his head round, and said in his suavest tones :

“I am merely going to see a friend, I shall be back within an hour.”

Then he passed out into the hall, first closing the parlour-door carefully behind him, and even pushing his hand twice against the wooden panel to assure himself that the hasp had been sent home. He stood a few seconds in the porch with his ear on the watch.

What if Kennedy should follow him out?

Not a sound came from the parlour, and Hinson stooped down and stealthily drew out from under the geranium-stand his dust-coat with the clumsy parcel wrapped up in its folds. Then he turned the handle of the outer door and prepared to go, but just as he put one foot beyond the threshold he saw the priest at the parlour-window looking out. Hinson drew back again. What was to be done now? Kennedy's acute eyes would notice the bulky parcel and he would be sure to suspect that there was reason for its concealment.

There was the back door behind the kitchen, but what was the use of that now since the high wall had been built round the chapel yard?

"After all," thought Hinson, "one may be too cautious. Kennedy, who is given to dreaming at times, will most probably not even see that I have a parcel." Then he passed through the door on to the pathway and went swiftly by the open window, and though Father John heard the crunching of the gravel and knew who it was, he never once lowered his gaze from contemplation of the heavens.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BOX OF DOCUMENTS.

HINSON did not find it so easy to run the gauntlet with Sall-o'-the-Wig as he had with Father John Kennedy. Sall was not much given to star-gazing, and now as she stood sentinel outside the yellow gate and Hinson drew near, her sharp eyes took immediate notice of the bulky protuberance sticking from beneath the gray dust-coat flung over his arm.

"Unlock the gate," said he in a cautious voice.

"Faix, an' that I will, an' id's meself is mighty glad to see ye, me ould aunt from Lim'rick."

She turned the huge key in the lock, but artfully kept her sturdy body pressed against the shut gate the while.

"Arrah, now," said she, in an insinuating tone, "an' what may ye be afther hidin' there?"

"Nothing particular," was the answer. "Don't, for heaven's sake!" he cried, drawing back uneasily, as she stretched her hand between the bars towards his left arm. "Don't touch it!"

"Sure, id wouldn't bite, would id? Athin," she added, with a yawn, as she flung the gate on its hinges, "av ye plaze, how long more am I to stop here dancin' attendance on yer honers?"

"I will be away about half-an-hour. Then we shall both go, and you will be relieved of your task for this night."

She let him pass out to the high-road, but her glance dogged him with all the hunger of an insatiable inquisitiveness.

"Musha, what can he have got?" she thought. "Id would be rale fun to afther him, an' make a snatch at id, an' find out."

But Hinson kept watching round him, behind him, and from side to side, as he hastened along the road towards the village, and Sally abandoned her intentions of startling him, and, re-locking the gate, resumed her post as sentinel.

The village was bathed in silence and sleep as

Hinson came within the shadow of the post-office.

Pausing an instant, he carefully laid down his coat with its wrapped-up burden on the ground behind him, and then picking up some small pebbles, he lightly flung them at the window of the room over the shop. He waited a second or two, but there was no response to his signal. Again he flung a handful of pebbles against the panes of glass, and this time the sash was raised and Kate Mahon's voice called out shrilly :

"Is that you, Pat ? What brings you back to-night ?"

"It is I."

"The 'master!'" muttered the woman, as she closed the window and prepared to descend.

Hinson carefully took up his burden again, and, as soon as the post-office door was open, he slid quietly in.

"Are we alone ?" he whispered, as he entered the dark passage.

"Not a soul in the house but myself."

"Then draw the bolt."

The woman lifted the heavy bar of wood from behind the door, and, in spite of the obscurity, managed to place it securely in its position.

"Light a candle," said he. "I'll remain in the hall until you do so, for I have that with me which might prove dangerous if it came into collision with anything."

Kate Mahon went into her parlour and struck a light.

The rays gleamed into the passage, and Hinson, seeing his way clearly, followed her into the room and gently deposited his coat with its contents underneath the table out of harm's way. Then he looked at the woman, and to his surprise noticed that, late as it was, she was fully dressed.

"You have not been to bed?"

"Yes, I have," she answered in some confusion. "I had a hard day's work, and felt so tired that I threw myself on the quilt, clothes and all, and fell asleep."

He looked at her searchingly, and then made a shrewd scrutiny around.

The room was very untidy, the furniture had a neglected appearance, and the grate and fire-irons were rusty and spotted. All so unlike the former Palatine neatness of the mistress of the house. Hinson's gaze rested again on the woman, and he saw a greater alteration in her than even in her surroundings. She seemed

aged by twenty years, and while her features had grown old and flabby, her eyes had a roving, restless wildness.

“I find you much changed,” said he. “Have you been ill?”

“No, I have not. I am growing old, that’s all. Years and hard work,” she added peevishly, “don’t improve a woman’s looks.”

He was not satisfied. There was something decidedly strange about her.

He was half sorry he had come to her, after all. But he could not carry this box with him, and Clarke had suggested his leaving it in charge of the postmistress until such time as they would be ready to quit Ireland once more. There was no denying that this woman had been of great service to them, and, judging from experience, was implicitly to be trusted; but, still, how odd she looked! She stood waiting for him to speak. At last, with a flash of impatience, she said:

“You doubt me.”

“You have given us too many proofs of your fidelity to warrant my feeling any sentiment of the kind; but what I wish to consign to you is of such vital importance that——”

“That you are afraid to trust me with it?”

“‘Afraid’ is scarcely the word.”

"If it is anything for the Cause," said Kate Mahon, as her eyes brightened and her face lit up, "then you need have no fear."

When the postmistress uttered the word "Cause" there woke on her countenance an expression blended of strength and intelligence, and Hinson, remarking this expression and being aware of the full meaning of it, resolved to confide in her. Besides, she was a woman of spirit and cleverness, and if she had aged quickly, what did it matter? She was young enough, at any rate, to serve the purpose for which he had sought her.

"Bring the light," said he, "and let us search the shop. We must have no eavesdroppers on our conversation of to-night."

The postmistress held the candle at the entrance-door leading to the shop, and Hinson groped amid the barrels and behind the counters.

"One cannot be too careful," he remarked, on returning to the parlour. "Now, get down the lantern. I must see if the back-yard is safe."

"I assure you there is no one on the place."

"Well, it can do no harm to have a look round. What I have to speak to you about is

too serious a matter not to take all precautions. We must not be overheard."

Going out into the yard, he peered around, and entered the stable and mounted to the loft where he had so often lain concealed in nights bygone.

There was not a trace of a human being to be detected. When they were once more in the parlour, Hinson took the gray dust-coat from under the table, and unwrapped from its folds an oblong tin case. This case resembled in some sort an ordinary deed-box.

"Keep back the light!" he hastily cried, as she approached him. Then he added in a gentler tone: "Put the candle on the chimney-piece and come here. I wish to explain what I require of you."

The woman did as she was bid, and came and stood close by him. He glanced at her again, and marvelled how quickly she had lost her freshness and her comeliness of features. But still he was far from suspecting what had caused such havoc in her personal appearance.

"I am about to put myself entirely in your power," said he, in the slow, musical voice, which so often had charmed and flattered his followers. "The principal plans and secret documents of the heads of the Brotherhood are shut up within

this box, which I shall confide to your sole charge."

"It is a serious trust," said the woman.

Though her face was blurred and bloated she had all her wits about her. Her couple of hours' sleep had sobered her, and now she was ready to pay the strictest attention to her visitor.

"It is a serious trust," said she. "Are you not afraid the box may be stolen from under my care?"

A significant smile passed over Hinson's countenance.

"Those who attempt to steal it will do so to their own destruction. Look!"

With a steady movement he slowly drew out a long, narrow scoop from the centre of the tin box. As he detached this part and placed it on the table there emitted from it a faint yet pungent odour like that coming from incense. This long, narrow scoop was partly filled with a shining, granular substance of a yellow-green colour, which was mixed with another and finer substance resembling silver sand.

"You see this," said he, pointing to the contents of the scoop. "A scientific friend of mine prepared it specially for me. It is an altogether novel substance, or rather combina-

tion of substances, the composition of which is known only to two or three persons. That it is so little known is a very good thing, for it would prove a most dangerous agent in ignorant hands. Now, mind, you must be more than careful."

"I will do my best."

"Only that I am fully aware of the fact that you never touch spirituous liquors, I dare not trust so dangerous a compound, even in your hands."

At these words Kate Mahon flushed and trembled, but Hinson was too intent on the box to perceive her embarrassment.

"Look!" said he, taking an envelope from his pocket, and laying it gently on the mass of shining yellow-green particles in the scoop. After an instant's contact the envelope shrivelled up, blackened, and fell to powder.

"Now, I want you to observe," he went on, "that on the outside of the box, just at the spot where the scoop fits in, there is a small slide. See!"

He drew the slide forward to the right, but nothing special took place.

"I think I know the use of the slide," remarked the postmistress.

"I don't doubt it," said he with a smile. "If I had left the scoop in the box, and then had drawn the slide, it would have scattered the substance all over the documents within, and they would have been noiselessly, but effectually, destroyed after the same fashion as the envelope. Now, we want, if possible, to preserve these documents. And they are not to be destroyed, unless in case of the direst necessity."

"What would you call dire necessity?"

"I leave the box here for three weeks. If the detectives track it here; if you get no warning, and cannot remove it to a safe place; if they come to your house and search for it, and all but have their hands on it, then, and then only, must you draw the slide and annihilate the contents for ever."

"I understand you," said she quietly. "I will do what you require."

"Are you sure you have nerve enough?" he asked.

"Nerve! It doesn't seem to me to need any particular nerve to draw a slide across a box."

"Don't be too certain," was the cold rejoinder. "I have not told you all yet."

He closed his eyes an instant and deliberated.

When he opened them again, he fixed them upon the granular, yellow-green particles, which shone in the dim rays of the candle like the burnished scales of a serpent. Then, smiling softly, he spoke.

"Under certain conditions, this chemical compound, instead of consuming the contents of the case by means of internal combustion, may explode. Within a limited space, it is true, but with such violence, that it will be fraught with the greatest danger to those near. Are you——" here he stopped and looked at her.

"Am I what?" she asked.

"Are you prepared to risk your life?"

The answer to this was a laugh with such a heart-broken cadence in it that Hinson stared at her.

"My life," said she, "is of so small worth to myself, or to anyone else, that I would gladly lay it down."

"Well," said he reassuringly, "though I mentioned the possibility of an explosion, there is no probability of anything so serious taking place if you are only careful. Just try before I put the scoop back to move the slide, once or twice to and fro to get your hand in practice.

Gently, gently, not so fast. Try again. You run it too jerkingly. There now. That is smoother. That will do. However, I hope there will be no necessity to use the slide at all."

Then with, if possible, more caution than he had drawn out the long, narrow scoop, he replaced it, and Kate Mahon's eyes followed the yellow-green crystals with an irresistible fascination, as they disappeared within the body of the case.

"Where will you keep the box?" he asked.

"In a cupboard in my room. I had a new double-lock put on the cupboard-door last week, and no one ever enters the room but myself."

He paused a moment and deliberated. He was still loth to let the documents out of his own keeping. But what was to be done? After all there was greater risk in bearing them about his person than in leaving them with her. Moreover, she was both faithful and acute, and would not fail to execute what she had promised.

"Take the lantern," said he, "and go upstairs in front of me. I will carry the case more steadily than you. There would be danger if you stumbled or slipped with it in your hand."

The woman mounted the staircase, and he followed slowly.

"Pah!" he exclaimed, with a sniff of disgust as he reached the landing. "What a filthy smell of stale spirits!"

"The fumes of whisky spread all over a house," said she. "One can't help that. Besides, it is my living, and I must put up with its unpleasantness."

"It sets my mind at ease to know that you never touch anything of that kind yourself," was his remark.

"Even if I did drink," she interposed fiercely, "you needn't fear. Not a taste of anything stronger than water will pass my lips until you claim your trust again."

Will she have strength enough to abide by this resolution?

"Place the lantern on the floor," said he.

Then he deposited the tin case between her hands as softly as if it were an infant. She entered the room in front, stowed the box away in a corner of the cupboard, double-locked the door, put the key in her pocket, and then rejoined Hinson, who had been watching her slightest movement from the landing outside. They descended the stairs in silence, and he went along the hall towards the street door. He was in the act of lifting off the wooden bar

when the postmistress touched him lightly to detain him, and said :

“Sir, how is Mr. Clarke? Is he well, or where is he?”

“He is at the chapel-house. He was too tired to-night or he would have accompanied me. I believe it is his intention to visit you before he leaves Ireland. Perhaps he may even come to-morrow.”

“No—no,” she said hurriedly, as a current of strong emotion swept across her face. “Tell him not to come. I do not want to see him.”

“Would you like to send him a message by me?”

“Yes,” she answered eagerly; “tell him never to come to see me any more. I could not bear it now. But tell him always to think kindly of me, no matter what happens.”

As she finished speaking, a moisture rose to her eyes which she dashed quickly away with her hand, as if ashamed of her passing weakness.

“I will bear your message faithfully,” said Hinson. He partly opened the door and looked out.

The moon shone clear and white on the solitary road, and all was peaceful and still. He put his foot beyond the threshold, when, as if

struck by a sudden thought, he turned towards the woman again.

"Ah! I forgot," said he. "Do you know anyone of the name of Hoolahan?"

"Hoolahan?" she exclaimed, surprised at the question. "My mother was a Hoolahan. But her people left Ireland for America twenty years ago and we lost sight of them."

"I have reliable information that the spy who betrayed our last movement came from Lusmore, and was called Hoolahan. We tracked him twice to the Lower Castle Yard, but he escaped us. He was a small, slightly-built man."

A sickening feeling came over her—a dread of some unknown horror.

"The Hoolahans were all big broad-shouldered men of six feet and over. There were never any people of that name here except my mother's family, and," she added passionately, "they were never of the blood that made informers. No, thank God! no matter what crimes they committed, they never fell so low as that."

"'Tis odd," said Hinson. "There must be some mistake about the name. I will strive to find out. Good-night, and be careful of the box."

"Do not fear," was her reply. "I will guard it with my life."

CHAPTER V.

THE WEDDING OF DRUMBAWN.

THERE was no more popular man in Lusmore than Ned Delaney. The honest farmer was equally liked for his independence and his good-humoured ways. In addition, though very keen at driving a hard bargain, he was never known to refuse help to a friend in need, or to turn a beggar away hungry from his door. So it was no wonder that everyone in the valley looked forward with the greatest pleasure to his marriage. Some of his neighbours who were blessed with a superabundance of grown-up daughters felt chagrined that Ned should go elsewhere for a wife; but then he had never flattered any of them with false hopes, for while on friendly terms with all the belles of Lusmore, he had never paid marked attention to any particular one amongst them.

The wedding-day rose cloudless, and the stal-

wart farmer, more handsome than ever in a new suit of home-made frieze, rode round the base of Kyleneamanna, accompanied by his best man, Gerald Moore, and attended by a numerous train of friends. The men of the party were mostly on horseback, and the women in vehicles of various sorts. Sall-o'-the-Wig was foremost in a low-backed car. She was fearfully and wonderfully arrayed in a spick-and-span new pink pinafore, and added liveliness to the scene by invoking from time to time the quickest strains of her violin. Those who came immediately after her carried on a merry running fire of badinage with her, but Sall was always ready to return better than she got, and the laugh was more often raised at the expense of the young rustic sparks who teased her. When the procession reached the entrance of Father John Kennedy's lawn, the priest was waiting on the back of Alphard just outside the gate.

"I am coming also, Ned," said he, addressing Delaney.

The farmer flushed with delight.

"There'll be no one more welcome, Father John," said he heartily; "I am glad to see you so well, sir. Why you look ten years younger than before you went abroad."

"I feel better," was the answer. Then Father John went behind to Mrs. Fogarty and Bride Killeen, who were in the rear on a jaunting-car, escorted by Peter O'Brady and Major Silverthorne. As the priest passed by his parishioners, he saluted them in turn. He tried to be genial and make some kindly remark to most, but the old proud habit of reticence clung so to him that his words and manner were stiff and constrained. Only once did the eagle eye flash with interest, that was as he caught sight of Pat Mahon. The ex-schoolmaster was foppishly got up for the occasion in a bright blue body-coat, white waistcoat, lavender tie, and coloured kid gloves. He smirked and bowed as Father John rode up.

"You here, Mahon! You seem to have many holidays from your business?"

The informer shifted his glance with an uneasy movement.

"My health is not strong, Father John."

"It strikes me that you must be what we call a pluralist. You must have another more lucrative occupation than your ostensible one as a commercial traveller."

Mahon's knees shrank under him, and he cast a terrified glance around to ascertain if any

members of the Brotherhood were within hearing. But he was principally encompassed by women, and they were too nervous at the neighbourhood of Father John's horse either to notice the informer's agitation or to take heed of the priest's caustic words. Alphard pawed the ground impatiently and looked at the bystanders with his soft, human eyes, and made a low, moaning sound as if striving to speak.

The startled people kept at a respectful distance, and felt relieved when the priest dropped to the rear.

"Oh! Father John," cried Mrs. Fogarty, as he approached her car, "I was overjoyed to hear you were coming with us to Drumbawn. Now, tell me, don't you think it a great shame of Ned Delaney to go to another parish in search of a wife?"

"Ah!" broke in O'Brady, with a roguish sigh, "love knows neither parish nor county. Now, there is our gallant friend, the Major, for instance——"

"Come, O'Brady, hold hard," cried Silverthorne. "Keep your imagination to embellish your own escapades, and leave me alone."

"Does Richard Neville intend putting in an appearance at Drumbawn?" asked Father John.

"I don't think so," answered Mrs. Fogarty; "but I believe his doll of a wife means to drive over for an hour or so."

These last words were intended less for the priest than for Bride, whose constant championship of Emily was a sore point with the mistress of Baltore.

The jaunting-car went on its way. Father John lingered several yards behind, and Alphard, as if guessing that it was his rider's mood to be alone, slackened his pace to a walk, and soon the jovial cavalcade were all some distance ahead of their pastor. The priest's gaze went after the living mass, and his thoughts wandered to Hinson and Clarke. Patting his horse's head, he said half aloud :

"Alphard, we have been resting too long. We must now begin to work in earnest."

The beautiful animal turned round his graceful head, and neighed softly as if understanding the words addressed to him.

And while the priest of Lusmore was communing with his thoughts and occasionally caressing the neck of his graceful steed, Mrs. Fogarty was wondering at the marvellous change in Father John's appearance.

"Bride," said she at length, "I never saw your uncle looking so well. He is actually growing young again."

The girl glanced backwards at the erect figure on horseback, and then her eyes strayed beyond him even to the dark wood of Killavalla, and she thought of her uncle's words: "I will never forgive you until——" With a sudden determination she tore herself from her own thoughts, and looked again in front. For this day, at least, she would strive to put all unpleasant things from her and be happy. Was not Gerald near, and did he not love her? To-morrow would be always time enough to be sad. To-morrow would be always soon enough to pursue her mission of discovery.

Darby Moylan of Drumbawn was a snug, well-to-do farmer, and as the bride was his only child, he had vowed not to be niggardly over her wedding. Mary was making a match after his own heart, for Ned Delaney had not alone a large, well-stocked farm, but he had money in the bank, a long lease, and no poor relations. True, Delaney was rather fiery, quick with his tongue, and quicker with his fist; but then his heart was in the right place, and

Mary would tame him down in her own quiet way. Now, Moylan had not alone given his intended son-in-law leave to bring as many of his friends as he chose, but he had also invited all his own neighbours for miles around; and as no one had refused, there was promise of a very large gathering and much frolic and harmless fun.

When the Lusmorites reached the Catholic chapel of Drumbawn they found Father Toole already there. The parish priest of Drumbawn was rounder and rosier than ever. He was astonished to see Father John Kennedy, but beyond the ordinary greeting, he made no remark.

Drawn up under the trees in the chapel-yard was a pony carriage, and in it was a small lady, enveloped in masses of lace and pale blue silk. As soon as Bride espied the well-known, sparkling face, she hastened forward.

“Oh! Emily dearest, I’m so glad to see you. How did you get here before us?”

The dainty little lady dimpled with playfulness as she touched her friend’s cheek with her gloved finger.

“My dear,” said she, “I was stupid and

Dick was cross, and as I hate stupidity, and detest ill-temper, I ran away to amuse myself and chase dull care away. How gorgeous you are, Bride! Was that dress put on to charm anybody? Oh, there are Major Silverthorne and Mr. O'Brady. I must have a gossip with them while we are waiting for the bride." She beckoned to the gentlemen with her apology for a parasol, and to Mrs. Fogarty's great mortification her two cavaliers deserted her to pay court to the tiny flirt.

The bride's party presently arrived, and Father Toole performed the marriage ceremonial without any delay. Everybody admired the bride except Mrs. Fogarty, who whispered to Bride Killeen :

"What a fright Mary Moylan is in white. She hasn't a bit of colour, and no figure to talk of. Oh, what fools the men are! Where were Ned Delaney's eyes?"

"Hush!" implored Bride, "someone may hear you."

"And look, my dear," added the garrulous matron, "did you ever see the like?—Lanty Dillon's cousin is in mourning, and she actually wearing white feathers!"

"So does a hearse sometimes," quietly re-

marked Peter O'Brady, who was at Mrs. Fogarty's elbow.

The ceremony over and the blessing given, the bridal party adjourned to Darby Moylan's. The hospitable farmer was in a great state of excitement, and rushed among his guests, gripping the men by their hands, and wanting them to drink, and assisting the women to alight from their vehicles, and telling them they were welcome—welcome as the flowers of May—to everything in his house. Huge fires were burning in the open farm-yard, and whole carcasses of sheep were roasting in front of them. Serving-women were hurrying backwards and forwards with plates and dishes, and there was as much confusion as merriment. At last, after a great deal of laughter and joking and scrambling, the guests were all seated in a large barn, where the wedding breakfast was laid out. Darby Moylan was at a loss whether to put Father Toole or Father John Kennedy at the head of the table; but the priest of Lusmore settled the question, by waving Father Rody to the post of honour and saying :

“ I will take the foot next Father Terence.”

Gerald Moore found comfortable places for Mrs. Fogarty and Bride. Before leaving them

the young man contrived to say a few words in an undertone to the latter, and Bride responded with a vivid blush and shy smile.

Sall-o'-the-Wig, who was scampering by with a tray and saw the whispering and blushing and smiling, muttered to herself, and then hastened off to attend to Peter O'Brady, and helped him to the best of everything before anyone else.

"Oh! my dear," remarked Mrs. Fogarty to Bride, as she glanced down the table, "do look at Pat Mahon. The conceited airs of the mannikin are too ridiculous. One would think he was the bridegroom himself. Just see; he is persuading that silly girl beside him that it is the correct thing to keep your gloves on during a wedding-breakfast. Why, if she hasn't actually pulled the thumb out of one of them in her effort to drag it on her hand again."

Bride turned at her friend's words, and looked towards the object of them.

When Mahon caught her glance, he leered back with an indescribable insolence, as much as to say: "If you couldn't appreciate me, there are others who have better taste." Then he whispered some disparaging remark about her to his neighbour, a fine girl, with brilliant complexion and bold eyes, who giggled and stared

at Bride with the triumph of a successful rival. At the upper part of the table there was plenty of noise and fun and loud talk. But occasionally above the clatter and tinkling of glasses could be heard either the rippling laughter of Emily Neville, as she gaily retorted to the flatteries of Major Silverthorne, or the sonorous voice of O'Brady, as he related some of his stupendous adventures. At the lower end everything was much less boisterous. Father John Kennedy was engaged in earnest conversation with Father Terence Delaney, and those in the immediate neighbourhood were too deeply engrossed in flirtation to pay any heed to the subject of the priests' confidential *tête-à-tête*.

It would be impossible to meet with a happier or more innocently-festive party on Irish ground or outside of it. The interchange of good wishes, cordial toast-drinking, blithesome but not ungenerous banter, all proved that these kindly folks had come to enjoy themselves, and were enjoying themselves to the full. There was no mock modesty amongst them, none of the dismal restraints of more dignified assemblies, none of that preliminary silence which casts such a blighting dulness over the first half-hour of many a City banquet.

If those in the vicinity of the priest of Lusmore were mostly given over to seriousness and sentimentality, Peter O'Brady's corner of the board was the head-quarters of frolic. The editor was in his sprightliest temper, and bubbled over with gleefulness.

"The pleasure of a glass of port with you, Father Rody," he trolled out to the chairman.

"Certainly, Peter, any port in a storm, supposing it was only Portroe."

"That local joke is as old as the hills," interrupted Major Silverthorne, who was not so forgiving as the man of letters, and had not pardoned Father Toole yet for his share in the election.

"And may I ask you, Major, why should the hills be older than the valleys for the matter of that?"

"Why not?" interrupted O'Brady, coming to the rescue of his friend. "Do not the valleys descend from them?"

There was a peal of merriment at this sally.

"More power to you, Mr. O'Brady," cried an aged farmer. "I wouldn't doubt you. Faix, he had your reverence there, Father Rody."

"Well, Mike, I had him over the contest for the county, anyhow."

At this the editor leaned back and put his glass in his eye. His lips twitched with suppressed merriment as he saw the farmers bend eagerly forward, anxious not to lose a word of the retort which they expected O'Brady was about to give to Father Rody Toole. But before their favourite could utter a word, a loud voice was heard calling :

"Misther Gerald Moore, ye're wanted."

In an instant all eyes were directed towards Sall-o'-the-Wig, who was in the doorway with a malicious grin on her shining face. Gerald started at the sound of his name. He was seated near the bride, and he was thinking how, if it were his wedding-day, he wouldn't care to have a lot of people around him, and then his glance strayed along the table to his own beloved, and he thought how beautiful and good she looked, and how commonplace all the other women seemed in comparison to her. His romantic musings were rudely broken in upon by the rasping voice of Sall :

"Mr. Moore, there's wan av yer frinds waitin' outside to see ye."

"One of my friends. Who is he, and why didn't you tell him to come in?"

"Ay, by all means," cried Ned Delaney ;

"bring him in, Sally, and we'll make room for him."

Sall gave an impudent look all round, and added, spitefully :

"Musha, the gintleman ain't fit for yer company. He's all hangin' in rags an' tatthers, and has forgot to wash his face; and he wants to spake to his frind, Misther Moore, for one minit."

Sall was bitter as gall against Gerald ever since his unexpected return from America had overthrown her pet matrimonial plan for the benefit of O'Brady.

Darby Moylan, who, when Sall first spoke of a visitor had gone out to bring him in, now returned alone.

"It is only a poor tramp who has a message for Mr. Moore," he remarked. "I told him to go to the kitchen and have something to eat, but he said he wasn't hungry."

Every eye was on Gerald as he rose and went out. In an angle of the yard he saw a ragged, miserable wretch leaning against a clump of turf.

"What do you want with me?" asked Moore, irritably, for Sall's jeering way had annoyed him.

The man rose from his position against the turf, and pointing towards a clump of trees a couple of yards farther off, he said :

“Come there. There will be less chance of our being observed or overheard.”

Gerald started at the tones of a voice so familiar. He looked sharply at the tattered object before him, and then walked towards the sheltering trees without making any remark.

“You know me, then?” said the tramp, as they were screened from view.

“I knew your voice at once, but otherwise I would never have recognised you.”

Hinson—for it was he, in the disguise of a beggarman, with a wallet across his shoulders and a stick in his hand—deliberated awhile, and then spoke again :

“The police are after me. I don’t know how they have found out that I am in Ireland. Clarke is waiting for me on the west coast. We start for America in a few nights. I want you to execute a small commission for me.”

Gerald started uneasily. He had no intention of allowing himself to be led again into the Brotherhood. He had shaken himself free once and for ever.

“Will you tell the postmistress of Lusmore

to destroy all papers she may have belonging to me ? ”

Gerald drew a breath of relief on hearing these words. There could be no harm in delivering so simple a message.

“ Yes, I will do so the instant I return to the valley.”

“ Will you also warn her to be very cautious in handling the box I left with her ? Tell her before she attempts to touch the documents she must gently take out the scoop from the centre, as she saw me do, and then she is to immerse the contents of the scoop in a tub of water and draw off the liquid and bury the sediment in a corner of the yard. Can you remember all this, or will I jot it down for you in our former cipher ? ”

“ I have a capital memory. If you repeat your message once more, I cannot fail to retain it.”

The message was repeated slowly twice over, and Gerald promised faithfully to deliver it word for word to Mrs. Mahon at the earliest opportunity.

Hinson briefly thanked him, and then, searching through the folds of his ragged garments, he drew out a letter, which he extended to the young man, saying :

"Will you also kindly give this letter to Miss Killeen from me? Tell her that I will be looking forward most anxiously for her answer."

A species of mental electric shock passed through Moore. Why should this man, or why should any man, write to Bride?

"I will not give your letter to Miss Killeen," was the unexpected rejoinder.

"Then," said Hinson calmly, "I must only deliver it myself. Please tell the lady I am here, and that I wish to speak to her."

Gerald was furious. His heart throbbed wildly, and he was seized with an uncontrollable fit of mad jealousy. This man loved Bride. This man whose fascinations she must have been often exposed to during his absence.

"Miss Killeen will have no interview with you, except in my presence."

"Why not, pray?"

The eyes of the two men met. One pair of eyes so fierce and passionate, the other so cold and calm, and the dual glance revealed the fact that they were rivals, and must needs hate each other.

"And why may I not see Miss Killeen alone?" asked Hinson, his quiet even tones exasperating Gerald more and more.

"Because she is my promised wife."

There was a pause; but whatever inward emotion Hinson felt, he was too long schooled in self-control to betray any outward sign.

"You are right," said he at length. "I have no claim to seek an interview with your promised wife."

Then he put back the letter whence he had taken it. As he turned to go, he saw Father John move across the yard towards an adjoining field, accompanied by Father Terence Delaney.

"Kennedy here!" thought Hinson. "He has begun already. I wonder if it is in him to persevere?"

Shrugging his shoulders incredulously, he bade adieu to Gerald, and said:

"Don't forget to tell the postmistress about my papers. And, above all, warn her to be careful how she handles the contents of the scoop."

Then he hurried towards the gate, but before emerging on the high road, he stood, an instant and looked back. At this moment Bride Killeen came to the barn door. At sight of her, Hinson made a step forward as if to greet her, but restraining himself, he turned away and soon disappeared up the road. Gerald, who had been watching his every movement, was sick with jealousy, and

felt an insane desire to relieve his feelings by giving someone a sound thrashing. Knowing, however, that in his present state of mind, he was not fit company for his fellow-creatures, he strolled off by himself to a distant part of the farm. After half-an-hour's rapid walking he returned towards the house. When he entered the barn, from which he heard the sounds of lively music, he found that the tables had been cleared away, and that the floor was filled with dancers. Father John Kennedy was standing abstractedly by the door, and Sall-o'-the-Wig, as usual, was tyrannising over the other musicians, and urging them on in her own brisk way. Ned Delaney was footing it in a lively style with Mrs. Fogarty, and the bride had the honour of having Major Silverthorne as a partner. Emily Neville was seated alone in a corner, pouting, because the gallant Major had left her side. As soon as Gerald appeared, she beckoned him to come to her; but he took no notice. He had grown older now, and more experienced in the wheedling tactics of flirts. So the pretty blonde fairy had no chance of casting her glamour over him so easily as in the bygone day, when, in the hill-meadow, Bride suffered so much from the defection of her lover and the coquetry of her

friend. It was now the young man's turn to feel the pangs of jealousy. He hovered restlessly close to Bride, who was dancing with O'Brady. The girl's face was flushed and beaming from the exertion, and her step was light and buoyant as she flitted round the editor.

Now and then she smiled at him over her shoulder, as, with a graceful spring, she darted away, and left him figuring alone by himself.

Gerald felt inclined to knock O'Brady down. Why should Bride look at him like that? Why should she be so pleased with everybody and everything? The young man wandered towards the temporary stand erected for the musicians. Sall-o'-the-Wig noticed the miserable expression of his countenance, and guessed what caused it. She stooped forward, and, giving him a smart tap with her bow, said:

"Sure, an' don't they make a foine couple? They're just made fur wan another, ain't they?" Then she shouted: "More luck to ye, Misther Pether, me darlint. Miss Bride, alanna, don't let him bate ye."

"Och!" cried Sall to the blind piper, as Gerald moved away, "I'm dying to see a scrimmage. Faix, if Father John wasn't here I'd kick up a shindy myself just for the fun av id."

At length Bride, tired and panting, gave up the contest with O'Brady, who was as fresh as when he began. It was as well that the girl stopped just then, for her lover, infuriated with jealousy, was ready to commit some foolishness ; but when she came to him and he met her confiding regard, his vexed soul grew calm, and he shamed of his reckless thoughts. She spoke some few words to him in a low, soft tone, and the affectionate trustfulness of her manner, and the knowledge that he was nearer and dearer to her than any other in the world, helped to soothe him. Scarcely remaining an instant beside him, she went towards Emily Neville to have a chat with her in her secluded corner. While they were speaking Bride's eyes wandered, and fell at last on Pat Mahon. The ex-schoolmaster was melodramatically statue-making against a beam of timber, his right arm akimbo, and the fingers of his right hand, now ungloved, spread out for effect.

He was paying compliments to his companion of the breakfast-table, and the vain girl was lending a willing ear to all he said. Bride, amused at this flirtation, was about to hint to Emily to look on at the play, when she was attracted by seeing a peculiar ring on Mahon's

third finger. Her heart stood still and then pulsed wildly as she fancied that, even at this distance, she 'recognised something familiar in the conformation of this ring. Abruptly quitting Emily's side, she stole behind Mahon, and fixed her eyes on his extended hand. Yes! there were the quaint little figures, there were the twisted spirals of deep yellow gold. There could be no longer any doubt. It was the Indian puzzle ring!

The ring which Adam Glover carried in his pocket the day he was killed, and of which no trace had been found after his death!

Bride was startled at the suddenness of this discovery, which meant so much, and which might even lead to the unravelling of the mystery of the foulest crime that had ever stained the valley of Lusmore. The ex-school-master was unconscious of the girl's scrutiny, and puffed up by the evident effect produced on the Drumbawn belles by his acquired city fascinations, he had waxed unusually loquacious, and emphasized his flattering speeches by gestures of the hand on which glittered the Indian puzzle ring. As Bride's eyes followed his every movement, there came to her, with a flash, the remembrance of his greedy looks at the Cuban

dagger as it lay on the mantelpiece of the chapel-house. Could he have stolen the dagger also ?

Soon the girl's vivid imagination caused her to fill in all wanting details, and she rapidly came to the conclusion that Mahon must have been the assassin. She never paused to think of the improbability of his wearing the Indian puzzle ring if he had killed its owner, nor did she consider the small amount of motive which could exist to drive the ex-schoolmaster to the commission of such a deed.

Pushing her way through the crowd in breathless haste, she clutched Father John by the sleeve, and almost shrieked out :

"Look ! Look, uncle ! See, he has got the Rector's ring on his finger. Oh God, I have found him out at last !"

Sall-o'-the-Wig, who had been watching Bride, and suspected that something out of the common was going to happen, now brought the music to a stop with a crash, and, whirling her bow over her head, leaped from the platform on to the floor.

"Hurroo ! Be the blessed Patrick, we're going to have some fun."

The dancers, brought to a standstill in the

midst of their jigging, saw Bride Killeen near the door, evidently in a state of great excitement, and with her arm lifted and her hand pointing at the ex-schoolmaster. The latter was looking furtively at her, with a scowl on his face.

“What is the matter, child?” asked Father John gently.

For a second or two she seemed unable to speak, but at length she cried out in a voice which rang clearly through the barn :

“’Twas Pat Mahon stole the dagger! ’Twas Pat Mahon murdered Mr. Glover!”

CHAPTER VI.

GUILTY OR NOT GUILTY.

THERE was great commotion on hearing the terrible accusation, hurled so unexpectedly by Bride Killeen at Pat Mahon's head.

Mahon, to all outward seeming, showed every sign of guilt ; but his emotion was caused by the dread remembrance of how he carried about him most damning evidence of his secret trade of spy.

He sprang towards the doorway, but recoiled when he saw Father John in his path, and rushed sideways to get through the open window ; but Gerald Moore, who was behind him, caught him by the nape of the neck and dragged him towards the beam of timber. The informer looked the picture of cowardly guilt. His eyes had a hunted expression, as he glanced round an instant, and then, turning savagely, bit at Moore.

"Let me go!" he cried. "Damn you, let me go!"

Two of the farmers hurried to Gerald's assistance and clutched fast hold of Mahon. The ex-schoolmaster was in an agony of terror; beads of cold perspiration stood on his forehead, and the blood seemed freezing to ice in his veins. What if they should search his pockets! What if they should find the letter addressed to Mr. Greaves at Dublin Castle, and the contents of which must betray the fact of his being an informer! Well he knew what small mercy would be shown to him. In their excitement and rage they might even take him out in the fields and hang him on the first tree to hand. While the men crowded closely around him, the women, timorous, but full of curiosity, whispered in groups in the background.

"Arrah, Father John, honey," cried Sall-o'-the-Wig, "sure there's a big rope in the yard. I'll run out an' git id, an' we'll tie the murtherer up be the hands an' feet."

"Be quiet, Sally," said the priest. Then raising his hand to command attention, he added: "Let Mahon go. His being accused of a crime does not prove that he is guilty."

The farmers drew back respectfully at Father

John's voice, and the ex-schoolmaster plucked up a little courage, and strove to look round with an insolent, sneering expression.

"They all hate me," he exclaimed, spitefully, "Miss Killeen as well as the rest of them; but she'd better take care what she says of me."

Moore, who had let go his hold of him, enraged at these words, caught him again by the back of the neck and shook him violently.

"Steady, Gerald!" said Father John.

The young man reluctantly loosed his hand from Mahon, and the latter's green eyes gleamed viciously, as, choking and panting, he looked all the venom he felt.

"Now, Bride," said Father John Kennedy, "what have you to say?"

The girl, who had been standing beside her uncle, her eyes of a feverish brilliance, and two hectic spots on her cheeks, now spoke, and they all listened eagerly:

"Do you not notice the third finger of his right hand? He is wearing the late Rector's Indian puzzle ring. I know it so well. The day poor Mr. Glover was murdered he had that ring about him. He showed it to me at our gate, and I saw him put it back into his pocket with a letter. Neither letter nor ring was on his body

when found dead. If it is not the Indian puzzle ring Pat Mahon will be able to take it off. Let him try."

The farmers pushed forward to watch. The ex-schoolmaster tugged and tugged at the ring in vain. It would not come off.

"Confound the cursed thing!" he cried. "I never laid eyes on it before this morning."

The beholders shook their heads and laughed incredulously at this exclamation. They knew how untruthful he was generally, and they were not going to believe him now.

"Have you anything further to tell us, Bride?" asked Father John.

"Oh! uncle, I am sure it was Pat Mahon who stole our Cuban dagger. Every time he was in our parlour, even while speaking to you, his eyes were always greedily watching the precious stones in the hilt as if coveting them, and one day I heard him muttering to himself, 'a thousand pounds, at least a thousand pounds,' and when he noticed my surprise he changed colour, and stammered out how it was an old trick of his to repeat sums aloud unconsciously."

At the mention of "precious stones," Major Silverthorne, who was leaning over the back of Mrs. Fogarty's chair, straightened himself

up, and with a meaning look at O'Brady, exclaimed :

“By Jove !”

The editor put his finger to his lips, as a sign for the Major to keep quiet.

Mahon, who had been regarding Bride Killeen with a quiet sneer, now cowered back uneasily, as he saw one of the farmers of Lusmore elbowing his way to the front.

“When did you miss your dagger, Father John ?” asked this farmer in an eager tone. “Was it a few days before Mr. Glover was killed ?”

“Three days before,” was the priest's answer.

The man's face flushed as he hastened to speak again.

“Well, your reverence, about three days before the murder, I saw Mahon just inside your lawn, and when he caught sight of me, he tried to slink away and hide behind the wall ; but I called out to him. Directly he came up to me he began to make up some story about his being at the chapel-house talking on business matters with you ; but I knew this was all lies, for I had met your reverence a few minutes before close by Castle Neville. When Mahon was shutting your gate behind him, a brown paper parcel

slipped out from under his coat, and fell to the ground with a clatter like the jingle of metal. For a bit of a joke, I said to him that I hoped he hadn't been stealing your silver spoons. I only meant it for fun, but you should just see the look he gave at me. I have seen some ugly faces in my time, but I never saw so devilish an expression on a face before, and I don't want to ever again."

"You lie, Barney Doolan, you lie!" shrieked the ex-schoolmaster.

"Hold your tongue, Mahon," said the bridegroom. "It looks black against you, and I'm sorry, for your decent mother's sake."

Because of their personal dislike to the ex-schoolmaster, there wasn't a farmer in the place who wasn't ready—unjustly ready—to believe the worst of him. Had Ned Delaney been accused of murder in a like manner, they would have sifted every tittle of the evidence against him, and would have been eager to lay stress on every point likely to tell in favour of the innocence of the stalwart bridegroom.

"You all hate me, every one of you!" yelled Mahon, who still tried to assume a blustering manner. "You all hate me because I have made a gentleman of myself. I know nothing of your

daggers or your knives, but I'll take an action against those who slander me. And as for you, Moore," he added, with a scowl back at Gerald, "I have it in a long time for you. See if I don't have you up for assault."

Gerald's only answer to this was a contemptuous smile.

O'Brady, who, with glass in eye, had been contemplating the ex-schoolmaster, now addressed him in a careless tone :

"By-the-way, Mahon, what about that large diamond which Riordan, the Knockbeg watch-maker, set in a ring for you a month or so after Mr. Glover's death ?"

"Ay, Mahon," said Major Silverthorne, "where did you get that fine stone ? Riordan showed it to us, and told us it was worth at least sixty guineas. If it were come by honestly, it is rather strange that such a smart young fellow as you are shouldn't sport it on this festive occasion."

At the mention of the diamond Mahon's lips lost all their colour, and his eyes travelled furtively around the barn. The men were collected about him in a crowd, listening for every word bearing against him. No one solitary face expressed the faintest pity or sympathy,

and each one looked as if ready to spring upon him in case he made the slightest attempt to escape.

The window to the left was open. If he could only reach it and leap through he might have a chance to escape. There were only a few women near it, and they would be too frightened to stop him.

"Father John," asked the editor, "is there a diamond missing from the hilt of your dagger?"

"I don't know, Peter," was the priest's answer. "We can ascertain that from Richard Neville, in whose keeping the dagger has been, as you are aware, for over three years."

"Look here," said Father Rody Toole, who was growing impatient of what he couldn't understand properly, "even if Mahon did steal the dagger, that would only prove him a thief and not a murderer."

A murmur ran through the barn at these words. The farmers of Drumbawn began to regard the ex-schoolmaster less suspiciously; but the farmers of Lusmore watched the changes passing across Father John's countenance, and waited anxiously for him to speak. Kennedy glanced at Bride an instant. The girl's excitement was all over, and she looked pale and nervous.

"My friends," said the priest of Lusmore at length, "on the day Mr. Glover was killed, my niece was the first person who came across his dead body in the wood of Killavalla. In his heart was my Cuban dagger with which the fatal blow had been dealt. She drew out the dagger——"

Here he paused and glanced again at Bride. The girl's eyes were now closed and her hands clasped, and she was trembling all over, and leaning against the wall as if for support.

"She drew out the dagger," continued Father John, "and hid it away unknown to everybody for some months. It is not necessary at present to explain her motive for such a strange proceeding. Three days previous to the murder the dagger was abstracted from my house, and the inference is that the thief must either know who the assassin is or have committed the deed himself."

There was quite a stir among the farmers and their wives as they heard this (to them unknown) phase of the tragedy of the Pass of Kylene-manna.

In the intensity of their interest they had drawn nearer to Kennedy, and had left Mahon partly unguarded.

The ex-schoolmaster seized his opportunity and made a rush for the open window. He had his hand on the ledge and was about to vault into the yard, when Sall-o'-the-Wig clutched him by the ankles and tripped him up.

He was on his feet again in a trice, but Sall flung her strong arms round his waist and held him tightly until the farmers gathered round and relieved her of her charge.

"D——n you all!" he cried, panting and frothing with rage. "Let me go! Curse you; let me go! I didn't do it."

"Hould him hard, boys," said Sall, "just for wan minit, an' I'll git the rope an' tie him up."

Then she pushed behind Father John with a "by your lave," and went into the yard. Mahon made an attempt to wrench himself free from the grasp of the men who held him; but when they threatened to fling him to the ground unless he kept quiet, he ceased struggling. He was afraid if they threw him down that the fatal letter might tumble out of his pocket. The possibility of his neighbours finding out he was an informer was pregnant with far more terror to him than even the accusation of the murder. Again drops of cold perspiration bedewed his forehead, his

lips became bloodless, and his complexion turned to a jaundice hue.

"Look at that white-livered scoundrel!" said Ned Delaney to the editor. "It seems mean to be hard on a fellow that's down, but I never felt so inclined to give anyone a kicking."

"It will just break the Widow Mahon's heart," remarked Denis Ryan, who was standing close by. "I always knew Miss Bride would find out all about it in the end. But who would have ever thought that it was Mahon who did it?"

"I never could bear his sly, sneaking ways," put in another farmer.

At this moment Sall returned with the rope. Making a running noose at one end she flung it over the ex-schoolmaster's head, and the men who held him let go of him sufficiently to allow it to drop below his waist down round his legs.

Mahon made a savage kick at Sall, but she tightened the rope, and he nearly fell forward on his face.

"Now, boys," she cried, "tie up his arms an' finish him off yerselves, and thin iv ye put him on my carridge I'll be afther takin' care av him meself."

The men fastened Mahon's hands to his back with the rope, and then one of them addressed Kennedy :

"If you please, Father John, what are we to do with the villain? Shall we take him to Knockbeg and give him up to the police?"

Father John, who had been conversing in a low tone with Father Terence Delaney, raised his head at this question and said :

"No, not to Knockbeg, to Lusmore. Mr. Neville is our nearest magistrate, and he will be able to tell us if there is a diamond missing from the hilt of the Cuban dagger." Then addressing the bridegroom, he added :

"I am sorry, Ned, that your wedding festivities should be marred by this unpleasant scene. I wish you and your wife every happiness. I shall expect both of you to dinner at the chapel-house next Sunday."

The honest farmer grew scarlet even to the roots of his hair, with gratified vanity. This was the first time that the proud priest of Lusmore had ever condescended to invite any of his parishioners to his table, and Delaney was so pleased and so astounded at the compliment that he couldn't utter a word of thanks.

Father John smiled at the emotion of the

stalwart bridegroom; and then the priest's rugged brow clouded over a little as he remembered how his own keeping aloof from his flock had caused them to wonder now even at an act of ordinary hospitality on his part towards one amongst them. Hastily turning away, he said in an abrupt tone that he would ride on before them to Castle Neville, and when they were ready they could follow with the ex-schoolmaster. However, before the priest could manage to quit the barn the bride's father good-humouredly barred the way.

"Now, Father John, honey, it is the only time you've ever crossed my threshold, and you're not going to leave Drumbawn until you drink my daughter's health. My missus has got everything ready in the parlour. Mr. O'Brady, will you bring in the ladies? Boys," he added to the farmers, "you don't mind stopping here? There is only room enough in the parlour for their reverences and the ladies, but my missus will send you over lashins of everything."

Kennedy hesitated, and looked towards the editor.

"Peter," said he, "if you take my place here, I can ride home leisurely to Lusmore."

"Look here, Father John," persisted Darby Moylan, "I'll have to send the gossoon to the fields for your horse, so I'll feel offended if you don't come into the house for a minute or two."

The priest yielded, and followed the hospitable farmer across the yard towards the dwelling-house.

A couple of the men carried Mahon by the head and heels and threw him carelessly on a low-backed car standing shafts upwards in the corner of the yard. Knowing he was safely pinioned, they didn't scruple to leave him unguarded, and returned to make merry with the rest of their comrades in the barn. Presently the serving-women and serving-boys came from the house laden with jars and bottles, and wherewithal for the farmers to drink a parting glass to the health of the bride and bridegroom.

Mahon was in a cramped, uncomfortable position lying slantways against the low-backed car, and was afraid to stir lest he might roll over on to the ground. He was full of rage and spite, and kept muttering to himself and biting his lips. Sall-o'-the-Wig approached him, and putting her arms a-kimbo, stared impudently at him. He was about to curse her when

suddenly a thought struck him that she might be induced to help him.

He was not aware that Sall had taught herself to spell out handwriting, and knowing she was amenable to a bribe, he decided to entrust his letter to her.

"Sally," said he, in a tone that he meant to be insinuating, "come nearer."

"Faix," said she suspiciously, "you don't mane to bite me, do ye?"

"Sally," said he, as she drew nearer, "I'll give you my gold watch and chain if——"

"Arrah, howld yer whisht!" she cried. "I wouldn't let ye free for all the jewils in the world, ye murtherin' thief ye."

His green eyes gleamed malignantly for the space of a second, and he bit his tongue before he spoke again.

"I only want you to post a letter for me and say nothing about it to anyone. My watch and chain are of great value."

A watch and chain! It was a temptation, and Sally couldn't see much harm in posting a letter.

"Musha, but are they rale—rale goold?"

"Take them yourself and see; but hurry before anyone comes."

She stooped forward and unhooked the chain from his vest and pulled out the watch, and weighed them both in her palm, and inspected them with admiration.

"May I have all the jingling things, too?" she asked, as she looked at the various pendant charms.

"All of them. Now, Sally, quick; put your hand inside the breast-pocket of my coat. Good Lord! don't stand staring at it, but hide it away!" he cried, in an agony of fright, as, having got possession of the letter, she tried to spell out the directions.

"Arrah, be aisy," was her answer, as she put the letter into her pocket. At this moment she was called from the house, and, hiding the watch and chain in her bosom, rushed away in great glee.

Mahon looked after her and groaned. A new spell of terror overpowered him. What if Sall should show the letter to one of the Lusmore farmers? He glanced round the yard. There was no one about.

Curse the confounded rope! If he could only get his hands loose. He twisted and writhed his arms, but he only succeeded in getting into a more uncomfortable position on the car.

Within the house, Bride Killeen was feeling very unhappy. No longer buoyed up by the first excitement of the discovery of the Rector's ring on Mahon's finger, she was horror-struck at the thought of being the medium of bringing the unhappy wretch to the gallows. Her distress was painfully heightened by the congratulations of Emily Neville and Mrs. Fogarty, who praised her, called her a heroine, and drew pictures of her giving evidence before the court on the ex-schoolmaster's trial for the murder of Mr. Glover. Two or three times the girl drew near the window, and gazed towards the corner where Mahon lay pinioned. She saw Sall-o'-the-Wig speak to him and then leave him. She heard the sounds of merriment quite plainly from the barn, and although the door was closed. The yard was empty of all save the unhappy Mahon. The people in the house were laughing and chatting, and paying no heed to the miserable creature outside. All her life Bride had had the greatest antipathy to Pat Mahon ; but now when she saw the unfortunate wretch in his present condition, her tender heart was touched with a strange pity for him. God help him, he was so wicked and so miserable ! God in heaven help him !

The yard was still empty, the barn door was still closed, no one was watching her, no one paying any heed.

Bride slipped quietly out of the house. When passing the kitchen she saw a heap of knives flung carelessly on the dresser. Among them was a large, shining carving-knife, which she managed to lay hold of unnoticed. The servant-women were too busy hobnobbing with one another to pay any attention to her movements.

She sped lightly across the yard, and approached Mahon. When he saw her he ground his teeth.

"You're come to gloat over your work, are you, Miss Killeen?" he said savagely.

"Hush!" she whispered. "Don't speak so loud. I am come to set you free."

Then she hastily cut the cords which bound his feet, and told him in a low tone to rub his limbs one against the other so as to bring back the circulation. He did so, but scowled at her all the time as if he doubted as well as hated her. She found it more difficult to sever the cords which tied his hands, and her heart panted as someone from within the barn carelessly banged the shutter of the window.

"Make haste!" muttered the ex-schoolmaster

with so fearful an imprecation that the girl recoiled in horror.

At length his hands also were free, but when she helped him to the ground he felt dizzy.

"Go by the bridle-path," she whispered. "They'll never dream of searching for you along there. God forgive you for what you have done. Oh ! how could you be so cruel as to kill him ?"

"Curse you, I never did it."

"Go—go over the stile. Quick, and may God have more compassion on you than you had on poor Mr. Glover."

Mahon would have fain stayed to curse her again, but there was not a moment to lose, and now that his limbs had recovered from cramp he was able to clamber over the stile and tear along the path pointed out to him by the girl.

Bride watched him until he disappeared, and then letting the carving-knife drop from her grasp she went towards the house. Had she done right in letting him free? At least he would have time to repent, and perhaps might do some good deed in the future which would atone for his evil past. Besides she herself would never have known a day's peace or rest, if through her agency his life had been forfeited. Guilty or not guilty, it would have been equally

dreadful for her to bear. The shadow of his blood would have darkened her whole future.

No one particularly noticed Bride's absence, and a few minutes later on she was chatting to Mrs. Fogarty with a light heart, when a sudden shout was heard from the yard. They all rushed out to ascertain the cause of the noise.

"Mahon's escaped! Mahon's escaped!" cried the farmers.

The majority of the men on hearing this darted out on the high-road in search of the fugitive; others hurried to get in their horses from the fields, intending to chase him on horse-back.

O'Brady, giving a shrewd glance round, espied the carving-knife. He picked it up and looked significantly from Bride to Sall-o'-the-Wig, but he could glean nothing from the expression of either of their faces. The girl's eyes were cast on the ground, and Sall returned the editor's look with more than her usual saucy impudence.

"Father John," said O'Brady, "this is a nice fix. What are we to do now?"

"We had better all start for Lusmore at once," said the priest. "If Mahon is hiding in this neighbourhood the Drumbawn men will soon ferret him out."

CHAPTER VII.

THE CONFESSION.

SEVERAL of the Lusmore farmers elected to remain behind and join their Drumbawn friends in searching the immediate neighbourhood for Mahon. After consulting together they divided into parties ; and some on foot and some on horseback they sallied forth to beat the fields and high-roads in pursuit of the ex-schoolmaster. Gerald Moore was among the younger spirits who joined in the chase. At first he had a slight feeling of compunction with respect to Hinson's message to Kate Mahon ; but then he reflected it would be plenty of time to deliver it in the evening. Besides he thought the poor woman would not likely be in a state to attend to anything when she should hear of the terrible accusation hanging over her son's head.

The remainder of the wedding guests joined the bride and bridegroom, and followed in the wake of Father John, who, mounted on Alphard, rode in front homewards towards the valley.

Sall-o'-the-Wig had so far broken her promise to Mahon that instead of posting his letter to Mr. Greaves she had given it to Father John. When the priest saw the directions his eyes flashed, and he remarked to O'Brady and Father Terence Delaney, who were standing by, that, judging from the fact that Mahon was in correspondence with the authorities of Dublin Castle, it was not difficult to guess from what source he had derived the principal part of his income. The editor wanted Father John to open the letter and read it.

"You forget, Peter, the letter is not mine."

"Well, sir," said the unabashed O'Brady, "I'd open it all the same. You can't have any nice scruples about the letter of a scoundrel who is likely to turn out to be an informer as well as an assassin."

The priest raised his brows sarcastically at this.

"Your notions about what is right or what is wrong are rather apt to get confused at times, Peter. Do not mention to anyone about this

letter. I will take it myself to Dublin and deliver it to Mr. Greaves. If, as I suspect, the purport of it has something to do with my people, I will demand as a right to be made acquainted with its contents." He added, after a pause: "Pat Mahon was not the person who murdered Mr. Glover."

"But how did he get the ring? Besides, no one else could have stolen your dagger," remarked Father Terence.

"I cannot say, but still I feel convinced he was not the assassin. I hope he won't escape, as through him we may be able to trace the real criminal." Then Father John rode on.

His people! The priest of Lusmore smiled grimly to himself. How sorely he had been out of his element this day! What a strain it had been on him to try and mix socially with his flock even for a few short hours! It was not alone the acquired habit of years, but his very nature which was against him. No, it would never do. He must keep apart and work for them after his own fashion. If Adam Glover were still alive, how inestimable would prove his aid in the task the priest had now set before himself!

Adam, who with a magnetic sympathy that

was more effectual than the most exquisite tact, could enter into the joys and sorrows of these people, and be one even with the humblest amongst them.

Whilst Kennedy gave himself up to his reflections, those who came behind him discussed the incidents which had happened at Drumbawn. The majority of them believed in Mahon's guilt, and marvelled what motive could have driven him to commit so foul a deed.

As they swept round a winding of the road which led to Lusmore, the old familiar scene came in view.

They saw rising before them the Devil's Bit Mountain, the Hill of Kylenamanna, and the dark, tragic Wood of Killavalla. Father John, who was well on in front, was struck by an unusual movement in the nearest part of the valley. He rose in his saddle, and looked towards the hollow where lay the village. What could be the matter? What were the people crowding for? While he was still looking, some children ran to meet the wedding cavalcade, shouting and waving their hands, and crying out:

"Come on, quick! You'll miss all the fun. The police are round the post-office, and the

Widow Mahon has barricaded the house up, and won't let them in."

"What is wrong?" asked the priest.

"Well, your reverence," said a bright-eyed urchin with a sharp, intelligent face, "the police have come to search the Widow Mahon's for fire-arms and papers belonging to the Brotherhood of the Mystic Star. When the postmistress heard they were coming, she turned out her customers and fastened herself up in the house, and they're going to break in the door."

On hearing this, Father John suddenly put Alphard to the gallop, and in a few minutes entered the village. The crowd respectfully made way for him to pass through, but raising his hand slightly, as a signal for them not to stir, he backed his horse, and, remaining on the skirt of the throng, gazed round him, his keen glance taking in at once all the aspects of the situation. At this moment the postmistress came to the window above the hall-door, threw up the sash, and looked down at the policemen with a defiant expression on her countenance.

"Come, Mrs. Mahon," said the sergeant of police, "it's no use holding out like this. You'd better let us in quietly. As soon as the men

bring a crowbar, we'll break in the door and get in in spite of you."

Her only answer was to turn away from the window. Presently she returned carrying the box which Hinson had placed in her charge.

The wedding party, who had hurried quickly after Father John, now reached the village and disposed themselves and their vehicles in a semi-circle behind the priest.

When Ned Delaney saw the postmistress with the tin box, he quitted the side of his bride for an instant, and approaching Denis Ryan he said under his breath :

"Do you know if she has got any papers belonging to the 'master'?"

"Faix, I don't know," was Ryan's answer. "But, if she has, she'll have plenty of time to burn them while the peelers keep dawdling about. Why, with a heave of my shoulder I could drive the door in."

"Not so easy as you think," said Delaney, "for there is a heavy wooden bar behind. All I'm afraid of is that she is in drink and doesn't know what she is doing."

"No fear of that," said Ryan. "I don't believe she has tasted spirits for the last ten days. She has given it up entirely. When she

sees me or any of the neighbours drinking in her shop lately there's a wolfish hunger in her eyes, and she looks with an awful longing at the liquor, but she never touches a drop all the same. Oh, she's a rare strong one, I can tell you."

"God help the poor woman!" cried Ned. "It will just break her heart to hear of that villain of a son of hers. Look! Look!" he added in a tone of great excitement.

Kate Mahon was the picture of defiance as she stood firmly grasping the tin box, her attitude and countenance expressive of scornful power. The hour of "dire necessity" which Hinson had alluded to was come and found her prepared to meet it. Her brain was clear, for Denis Ryan was right, she had not tasted spirits for a week.

Not a single drop had crossed her lips since the "master" had left the papers in her charge. She remembered every tittle of his instructions and meant to carry them out exactly. She would be careful and all must go right.

At this moment her attention was attracted by a few sentences uttered by a policeman immediately beneath.

"Oh, the postmistress will get off easily enough even if we do find ammunition or compromising documents concealed in her house.

You see they won't be hard on her on account of her son. Commercial traveller? Oh no, that was all a blind. In reality Mahon is Hoolahan, the informer."

As the full meaning of these words struck the woman she staggered against the ledge of the window, and for an instant it seemed as if the box she held must fall from her trembling hands. She gave one short, quick gasp, and then closed her eyes.

When she opened them again there gleamed within them a wild, despairing light. For a few seconds she stared vacantly in front of her, and her lips moved nervously, but no sound came forth.

Then she began to fumble with the lid of the box as if in search of some particular part. While she was so doing a man approached with a crowbar, and, by direction of a constable, commenced to break in the door of the post-office.

But the sergeant of police hastily told him to desist. Something in the woman's attitude and expression had caused the astute official to watch her movements closely. The tin box roused his suspicions. What did it contain?

"Back, men! Back for your lives!" he shouted suddenly.

The cordon of constables hurriedly retreated at this command, making the crowd behind recede farther.

The warning came just in time, for instead of drawing the bolt gently aside after the manner so carefully explained to her by Hinson, Kate Mahon, with a reckless laugh, gave a smart blow to the top of the box and smashed it in. The effect was fatal and instantaneous.

There was a blinding flash, a rumble like thunder, a quick, sharp explosion, and then to the horror of the dismayed lookers-on, the front wall of the post-office seemed to collapse, and they saw the form of the postmistress disappear amid the masses of falling masonry.

For a moment there was a terrible panic. The women and children screamed, and the horses of the wedding party grew restive, and plunged and reared madly. Then above the din rose the clear, commanding voice of Kennedy :

“Steady there ! Keep quiet !”

Like magic those words calmed the excited crowd. The women’s screams toned down into frightened sobs, and the men busied themselves in soothing their nervous steeds.

As soon as the dust and smoke had cleared away the constables rushed eagerly forward, but

quickly beat a retreat again, as an ominous crackling sound from within the ruins warned them of the possibility of a second explosion following in the wake of the previous one. A few policemen in the immediate vicinity had received slight bruises from the flying bricks and mortar, but otherwise apparently no one had been injured except the unhappy creature who, either intentionally or accidentally, had caused the catastrophe, and who now was either dead or dying beneath the ruins of a portion of her own house.

Father John alighted from Alphard and proceeded towards the post-office. In vain O'Brady strove to hold him back, remonstrating with him on the folly of thrusting himself thus into danger, and warning him of the existence of the inflammable materials lying close by in the shop. The priest impatiently waved the editor aside, and only strode more resolutely forward for the interruption. There was that in the undaunted bearing of the woman which woke a sympathetic chord in the proud priest's breast, and he divined that some powerful motive had goaded her on to what he believed to be self-destruction. He entered the wrecked building and sought her. From one corner he heard a low moan, and,

approaching, he saw Kate Mahon prostrated with a heavy beam of timber lying across her chest. He stooped over her, and strove to lift the beam, but he was unable to stir it.

"I am dying," she murmured. "Tell them I was never a traitor."

Then, recognising Kennedy, she gasped :

"Father John, I'll confess all now. God forgive me ; but it was I who stabbed Mr. Glover in the Wood of Killavalla !"

"You ! you !" he cried incredulously.

"Yes, I killed him. It was all over in a minute. I—I——" Here nature and pain conquered her, and she became insensible.

It was Kate Mahon who committed the murder !

The young girl with the blending of romantic Irish and warrior English blood in her veins, who used to dream on the lone hill-tops that she was destined to be an Irish Joan of Arc, fated to free her country from the hated Saxon yoke ; the youthful matron who, when those dreams were over and she had brought into the world a child, still fed herself with the ardent hope that this boy would realise all that she had failed in ; the mother who, later on,

had her heart wrung in secret by the sight of her son expanding hourly and daily into everything that was ignoble and unworthy; the woman, the purity of whose life and the integrity of whose character had gained her the respect, if not the liking of her neighbours, had culminated her career by committing a murder—the murder of the gentle and kind-hearted Adam Glover!

They extricated the postmistress from her position underneath the heavy beam of timber and carried her to a neighbour's house, and when the Knockbeg doctor saw her, he told them she could not possibly live the night through.

"I don't want to live," she said; "send for Mr. Richard, and tell Father John to come here near me. I want to tell them before I die."

And though she was suffering agonies of physical pain, she never let a groan escape from between her compressed lips; but when someone mentioned her son, she gave a sharp cry of anguish, and passionately shrieked:

"Son! I have no son."

Then, shuddering, she turned her head to the wall, and spoke no more until Richard Neville came to take her dying deposition. But while

the magistrate was there solely for the purpose of listening to her confession, her words were addressed to, and her eyes were directed towards, Father John alone.

The priest of Lusmore leaned against the post of the bed on which Kate Mahon lay, and gazed down at her. As he hearkened to the strange tale she had to tell, he marvelled at the powers of endurance with which she repressed all outward signs of bodily suffering. According to her own showing she had taken his friend's life, and yet he could not help having a sentiment of profound pity for this woman who had committed murder, not through a spirit of hatred or revenge, but as if fatally impelled to the deed by an earnest but misdirected impulse of patriotism.

He remembered how in the bygone time a friend of his used to maintain that we all had a chained demon within us ready to break loose when least expected, and now he seemed to understand how Kate Mahon's chained demon had got the upper hand of her for one direful moment.

She related how on the morning of the Rector's death, when in her son's bedroom, sorting out his shirts for the wash, she found the

Cuban dagger wrapped up in a white vest and concealed in a corner of the chest of drawers. She knew to whom the dagger belonged, and immediately suspected that Pat, tempted by the value of the gems, had abstracted it from the priest's house. Pained and horrified to find her son had become a common thief, she hid the dagger about her person, with the intention of seeking the earliest opportunity to replace it if possible unnoticed within the precincts of the chapel-house.

Before she could manage to restore it, the unexpected advent of the military in search of Hinson turned her thoughts in another direction. As soon as she had put the soldiers off the scent, by leading them to the foot of the wrong hill, she left them and hastened after Bride Killeen, up the secret pass of Kyleneamanna. When she reached the open space in the centre of the wood, she was startled to see the Rector advancing before her.

He turned as her footsteps sounded on the crackling brambles, and when he recognised who it was, his face grew clouded in its expression, and he asked what brought her there. Before she could make any reply, he took a letter out of his pocket and told her how he knew now all

about the plans of the Brotherhood, and how she herself had been an accomplice and trusted confidant of the agents of the secret organisation, and then he upbraided her sternly for her conduct.

“For a moment,” said the woman, “I was half-stunned at Mr. Glover’s words and manner. He that always had been so gentle and kind, appeared all at once transformed into the semblance of an angel of wrath. When he moved towards the narrow winding-path which led up the hill I recovered from my astonishment, and rushing after him, grasped him by the wrist and strove to wrest the letter from him. He shook himself free from me, and bade me go home and attend to my business ; for that he was on his way to the hut in the gorge, where his misguided flock were now assembled, and where he would call on them to lend their aid in delivering Hinson over to the arm of the law. As he spoke, I was seized with a violent fit of rage, for I knew well that the ‘master’ in prison, the Brotherhood would be broken up—the Brotherhood which was striving so hard to free Ireland.

“‘Give me the letter !’ I cried. ‘Give me the letter !’

“The Rector looked at me, and his face

softened, and he bade me go home in a much gentler tone than before. But his mildness only increased my rage. I thought of the dagger which I had carried about me all the morning. I put my hand in the folds of my dress where it was concealed, and the touch of the cold steel sent a thrill of fire through my veins. For a moment I was mad. My brain reeled, and—
and——”

The woman stopped abruptly in her narrative and her eyes wildly sought those of Father John. The priest beckoned to O’Brady, who brought a glass of water and held it to the postmistress’s lips. She drank a mouthful and then went on :

“Mr. Glover stood waiting for me to begin to descend before he should proceed on his way upwards. I looked around. We were alone in the heart of the wood. All alone but for the trees, and the grass, and the bit of blue sky above. Then something whispered within me, ‘he is good—he is always prepared to die. He is good, but he is an enemy of the Cause.’ The blood rushed to my head, and I went mad. With a sudden jerk I raised my right hand, and with one swift, strong blow I drove the dagger straight into his heart. He fell, and in his fall I was dragged heavily to the

ground along with him. I scrambled to my feet in an instant, and stared down at the upturned face. I had done my work but too well. He was dead, and I was a murderer. Then all about became changed in colour to me. The sky was crimson; the trees and grass were no longer green, but red; and I was as if surrounded by rivers of blood. I snatched the fatal letter from the still warm body, and fled homewards through the wood, trying to escape from the horrors of the place. But I could not fly from myself, nor from the dead face which haunts me ever since.

“I found the village deserted, and I reached my house unseen. Not a soul was in the shop. I took a bottle of whisky from off the shelf, and swallowed a long draught of the fiery liquor. I believe I drank nearly a third of the contents of the bottle, but it tasted only like water to me.

“Then I shut myself up in the back parlour, and opened the letter.

“Out of the envelope there tumbled a little case, with a strange-looking ring in it. I strove to read the letter, but the words swam before me in blood. I struck a match, and watched the letter slowly burn on the hearth, and as I stooped over it I shuddered, for my hand came against my brown woollen skirt which was wet

—wet with *his* heart's blood. I put the little case, with the ring, in my bosom, and hastened to change my clothes before anyone should see me. Soon the soldiers returned to the village bearing with them the dead body of Mr. Glover, and the neighbours trooped into my shop to bemoan and lament his dreadful fate. I listened to them as they called vengeance down on his murderer; but I had no fear of what they could do to me. As they didn't mention it, I wondered what had become of the dagger I had stabbed him with. Often long after I used to think Pat had it, and sometimes even in my weaker moments I used to believe that he suspected I knew about the murder.

“From the hour I killed Mr. Glover I knew no rest by night or day. Waking or sleeping, his face always came before me, and on Sundays in church I used to see him stand in the pulpit behind our present Rector, with his hand stretched out, and his brown eyes turned in my direction. Sometimes I felt as if I must shriek out in the middle of the sermon, and tell them all that I was the murderer. Then I took to drink to numb my brain and my nerves, and make me forget—I, who had always despised the poor, miserable wretches who came daily to my

shop to seek in spirits the life they had not in themselves. I had now become as weak as the weakest amongst them. Soon even the strongest whisky had no effect on me, unless it was mixed with the blue-stone,* for I could only find relief and forgetfulness in what would burn me with its fire. But now it is all over, and I am glad to die."

She ceased, and lay panting and exhausted, and her face was a brilliant scarlet.

The Knockbeg doctor, who was in the room, hastened to administer a cordial to her; but when she tasted it she pushed the glass away, and muttered:

"No—no—not that. The bottle—in the cupboard. Ned Delaney knows where. Give—give——"

"She is delirious," said the doctor, as he pressed her pulse with his fingers.

Suddenly Kate Mahon sprang up in the bed and glared wildly around.

"I did it for the Cause," she cried. "I was never a traitor!"

* Blue-stone or blue vitriol, with which occasionally in the lower class public-houses and shebeens in this part of Ireland the whisky is adulterated to make it taste more fiery and biting. Liquor so poisoned, if indulged in to any degree, causes both moral and physical deterioration.

Then, as she met Kennedy's gaze, she cowered back, and, covering her face with her hands, moaned in heartrending accents :

“ Proud of my son ! Oh, God ! *my* son—spy—thief—informers—betrayer of his comrades and his country ! ”

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ELEVENTH HOUR.

THOSE who remained behind in Drumbawn to hunt after Mahon were doomed to disappointment. Though they searched all round about the neighbourhood until night fell on them, they could find no trace of the fugitive, and at length, baffled and dispirited, they dispersed severally to their homes. Gerald Moore and the Lusmorites returned to the valley, where, to their great astonishment, they heard the news of the explosion and subsequent confession of murder by the dying postmistress.

During the following week Kate Mahon's confession was the sole subject of conversation in Lusmore, and the details of her disclosure, as they passed from lip to lip, served to renew the original sorrow and grief felt by the inhabitants

of the valley at the death of the gentle Adam Glover.

It seemed as if they had but lost him yesterday; and loving pilgrimages were made to the green grave beneath the hawthorn bush in the pretty Protestant churchyard, and offerings of fresh flowers were brought by Celts and Palatines alike, and some among the Catholics, forgetting that he was not of their religion, knelt and prayed fervently "God rest his soul."

On Sunday the Catholic chapel was crowded, for it was more than surmised that Father John would refer to the events of the past week. Nay, even many of the Palatines deserted their own ivy-covered church to come and hear what the priest had to say about their beloved pastor, their pastor who had loved him and them so much. Father John did not say a great deal, but what he did say was broken and abrupt in style. He forgot to be intellectual, he forgot to be proud. Unconsciously his heart bared itself a little, and the impulsive hearts of his flock throbbed in quick response. It was a brief, passionate flash of sympathy, but it charmed and electrified his listeners and made them feel towards him as they had never felt before. And

they did not once suspect that he meant it as a farewell.

It was now well known that Pat Mahon was Hoolahan, the informer, and it would have fared badly with him if he had dared show himself within the precincts of Lusmore; but the ex-schoolmaster never set his foot in the valley again. Some said he must be dead or he would have come to claim his mother's money which was lying ready for him in the Provincial Bank of Knockbeg; others thought, probably, that learning how the secret of his past career had oozed out, he had changed his name and fled for safety to some foreign country.

One fine afternoon, Father John rambled, book in hand, about his lawn, and as he passed close to the bower library he glanced towards Gerald and Bride, who were arranging some trellis-work on the outer wall of his pet retreat. The young man was mounted on a step-ladder, and the girl stood beneath holding a box of nails. Bride's upturned face was radiant with happiness, and her deep-blue eyes were full of a restful tenderness. And as her uncle watched her something in her attitude and expression woke a sudden memory, and he turned away with a faint sigh.

Drimin, unheeded by her mistress, had escaped from her paddock and was lying on the grass, contentedly chewing the moist, green clover; and Alphard, in great glee at being no longer confined in a stable, scampered joyously hither and thither. In one of his rounds the horse checked his wild career, and, approaching his master, gracefully bent his head for the expected caress. The priest gently laid his lean, sinewy hand on the steed's neck.

"We are both solitary ones, Alphard," he said; "both fated to tread our path alone."

The beautiful creature lifted his human eyes to his master with a look of quick intelligence, and then rubbed his silky mane against the priest's sleeve, and neighed softly.

At this moment the noise of wheels was heard, and the sensitive creature bounded away. The editor of *The Avenger* came in sight on a jaunting car, driven by Sall-o'-the-Wig. When Sall saw Father John she stood up in her seat, her short petticoats flying and her dishevelled locks floating in the breeze.

Then, with a wild shout, she whirled her whip high in the air as a salute, and, urging on her wretched bony steed, dashed round the corner of the garden wall and up to the porch in

splendid style. While Sally went to put up the horse and car, O'Brady crossed the lawn to greet the priest.

"Well, Peter," asked Father John, as they shook hands, "anything new?"

"Nothing, sir; except what I don't believe."

"What is that?"

"Why, they say in Knockbeg that you have resigned the parish, and that Father Terence Delaney is coming here in your stead, and that you are going away."

"It is true."

At this quiet rejoinder, O'Brady's cheerful countenance visibly lengthened.

Putting his glass in his eye, he contemplated the priest with an aggrieved expression.

"Well, Father John," he burst out, "if you leave here for good, what is to become of me, I'd like to know?"

Whilst speaking, they had been walking in the direction of the house, and now passed on to the gravel path in front of the door.

Kennedy took a few strides forward in silence, and then, leaning his back carelessly against the porch, he gazed on the scene before him.

"I have always felt cramped and trammelled in this valley," said he at length. "For me

there needs a larger field and sharper minds—minds whose opposition will sting me to battle. Once free, perhaps I may manage to shake off this indolence which has clung round me as a garment for years. Perhaps I may yet be able to do something for Ireland.”

“But your health, sir? You are not equal to any excitement. You’ll never stand the change. It will kill you.”

“If the end be so near, then all the more reason that I should hurry up and make use of the remnant of life which is still left to me.”

The editor looked ruefully around. The turn affairs were taking was not at all to his liking. He glanced towards the lovers and frowned, as if it were their fault.

Gerald had finished nailing up the trellis-work, and was now standing near the open door of the bower library with one of Bride’s hands clasped between both his, and his head bent over her, as if urging some request very earnestly.

“She’ll be off soon, too,” thought O’Brady, “and they don’t care what’s to become of *me*.”

“Well, sir,” he said aloud, “I think it downright foolish for you to——”

“There’s no use trying to dissuade me, Peter,” interrupted Father John hastily. “My

mind is made up. I will keep the old place in my own hands," he added after a pause. "I could not bear to part entirely with my books, nor yet with the home which has known me so long, and whose walls are dear to me because of the friends who have been within them."

O'Brady pushed back his curls with a gesture of despair and perplexity. Presently his eyes twinkled and he cried :

"Well, Father John, if you are determined to go 'tilting against windmills,' I shan't be left behind, I can tell you. I'll come too."

Then a silence fell between the two men, and the priest's gaze wandered towards the mountain and his face was touched with a strange, tender wistfulness, and the harsh features grew marvellously soft, and his eyes had within them a light which was not of earth.

"Oh, Almighty Master," he murmured, "even at the eleventh hour it is not yet too late to add a mite of honest work to the cause of this people."

A balmy breeze stole over the vale of Lusmore, the birds sang merrily as they flew from tree to tree, the flowers shed a thousand delicious odours on the freshening air, the summit of Kylena-

manna was steeped in sunshine, and here and there over the surface of the dark Wood of Killavalla the tree-tops were tipped with molten, ruddy gold. Then a light, grateful rain came pattering gently to the earth, and as the sun was setting, lo! a rainbow gleamed suddenly forth, and hung tremulous in the radiant sky. And the bow of promise, rising in delicate haze from behind the northern hills, gradually broadened, and deepened, and brightened until the mid-firmament was one blaze of gorgeous colour; and then the arc melted and faded away softly again behind the river, thus gathering within its embrace the fairest portion of this fair vale of Munster.

Hand in hand, on the threshold of the bower library, the lovers stood looking at the glory of the heavens, and John Kennedy, as he rested against the porch, had his heart glad with a quiet gladness because of the beauty that was without and the hope and resolve which were within.

CONCLUSION.

MORE than ten years have gone by, and, as of old in the vale of Lusmore, Celts and Palatines still wend their way side by side to their daily toil through rich meadows and pasture-lands. And while beyond their hills all Ireland is in a state of transition and unrest, this favoured spot in the heart of Munster abounds in prosperity and content. Their almost total immunity from the evils and worries which harass poor humanity would tend to render the inhabitants of the valley callous to the distress of their less favoured compatriots, were it not for the zealous efforts of Father Terence Delaney, who teaches them to give out of their abundance to those who need it. And thus the poor in the west and north of Ireland often receive large gifts of seed potatoes and parcels of warm clothing from Lusmore.

At the "eleventh hour" was, after all, too late; for, before John Kennedy could accomplish anything for the good of his country, his worn frame gave way, and his spirit followed in the wake of his friend, Adam Glover. One beautiful sunset in the bower library, in the midst of his beloved books, the summons came, and the priest, with a profound sigh of contentment, answered to the roll-call of the ever-increasing army.

Presently, when they sought him, they found Alphard standing moaning outside the glass door of the library, and within Kennedy was seated with his face resting sideways against the volume which he had been reading, and when they looked closer at the priest they knew that his heart was stilled for ever.

For a whole week Alphard would not be comforted, and ran wild through the hills, bemoaning his master. Then, one morning at break of dawn the horse plunged down the steepest side of Kylenamanna, and, rushing across the moist fields, never stayed until it reached the threshold of the bower library, where, falling, it died of sheer grief.

James Hinson returned no more to Lusmore, nor yet even to Ireland, and by degrees his name and his deeds became as memories of the past.

By some odd inconsistency of character, or through some flaw in his nature, just when his powers were at their ripest, he suddenly let his life drop into inaction, and disappeared altogether from public view. The Brotherhood of the Mystic Star, deprived of its head and originator, soon disbanded, and while some of its members emigrated to the United States, the greater number of them remained at home, and returned quietly to their former avocations.

The halls and corridors of Castle Neville ring often now with the treble voices of children, and echo back the sounds of their gleeful laughter, and Emily, more vivacious and sparkling than ever, amuses herself by flirting with and fascinating her little ones; and even Mrs. Fogarty, of Baltore, is reluctantly obliged to admit that there might be worse mothers than Richard Neville's doll of a wife. But the duties and graces of maternity are not the only qualities which the passing years have served to develop in the golden-haired witch, whose arch smiles and teasing ways still form the delight and the torment of her adoring husband. Emily's shrewd and observant brain had caught from afar off a glimpse of the advancing spirit of the times, and she saw all the advantage of quickly and spon-

taneously proffering that which later on might come to be demanded as a right. So she worried the easy, good-natured owner of Castle Neville until, influenced by her counsels, he gathered together his tenants for the purpose of making a new arrangement with them with respect to the land which they cultivated, and which he and they reaped the fruit of.

“Well, Mr. Richard,” said Ned Delaney, his honest face beaming with satisfaction as he stood up to act as spokesman for himself and his fellow-farmers in expressing the gratitude they felt for the concessions so unexpectedly offered to them by their landlord, “live and let live is a good, honest old maxim, and you’ll be none the worse, sir, for following it out as you have done with us. We are very grateful to you, all the more so because you have offered us this of your own free will.”

“It is Mrs. Neville you must thank and not me,” said the landlord smiling.

“Then God bless her,” put in Delaney. “Sure it is the women—I mean the ladies—that beat us entirely for cleverness and——” Here Ned stammered and grew very red as he heard a chuckle behind him. It was a standing joke among his neighbours how the stalwart farmer

was completely subdued and mastered by the small wife he had brought home from Father Rody Toole's parish.

Over the Court-house in the clean little town of Knockbeg the figure of Madam Justice still keeps watch and ward, holding her badly-balanced scales. On post-nights the office of *The Avenger* is more frequented than ever by friendly neighbours, who drop in to have a gossip, or correct proofs, or read the latest news. O'Brady is as gay as ever, though there are some ill-natured folk who, envious of his popularity, will have it that he is breaking down and is apt to repeat the same stories over too often.

Major Silverthorne has grown rather feeble in the legs, but is a greater dandy, if possible, than formerly, and sighs and looks sentimental, and ogles all the pretty girls as if he were in the heyday of his youth.

But, in spite of his susceptibility to the charms of the fair sex, the gallant Major never fails to have his share of the good things which find their way as gifts to the larder of O'Brady. As post-day comes round Father Rody Toole's whip is sure to be found standing in the familiar

corner of *The Avenger* office. There are those who say that if the editor set up again as member of Parliament Father Rody would be sure to back him.

When asked for special information on the subject, O'Brady laughs knowingly, and thrusting his fingers through the brown curls, now streaked with gray, he winks slyly at his questioner, but makes no reply. With Sall-o'-the-Wig the editor is still the "rale darlint av thim all," and when tired of the valley, or weary of Dublin, where she stays sometimes with Bride, Sall never fails to show her shining face at *The Avenger* office, to the secret amusement of the printers, and to the terror of the nervous, worried foreman, whose plague she is with her tricks and her interference.

And Bride and Gerald? Gerald Moore has started a newspaper in Dublin on Independent principles, and is doing fairly well.

Bride is his wife, and, as a matron, is far handsomer than even she gave promise of in her girlhood.

She still retains all the charms of her fresh, natural ways, all her candour and straightforwardness; but her face, while losing none of

its former brightness, has gained in depth of expression. Gerald is more her lover now than when they were first married, and maintains that his Bride carries sunshine and consolation wherever she goes. Her city friends, when they speak of her, make use of the same phrase which William Clarke did one hay-making day long ago when, for the first time, he heard John Kennedy's niece sing her mowing song in the hill-meadow of Lusmore—"Sweet and wholesome."

Yes, she is sweet, and wholesome, and honest, and true in all her relations, whether of friendship, or wifehood, or motherhood.

For Bride is a mother. She has one child, a son, a brown-eyed, brown-haired, sturdy urchin, full of vitality and humour. And though he is not so handsome as either his father or mother, still he is such a genial little soul, and has such a frank, bright, open face, that he invariably succeeds in making friends for himself. Peter O'Brady is his godfather, and the boy is named John Kennedy, in remembrance of Father John. When Bride visits Lusmore, Kennedy (as he is called for shortness), who is a prime favourite there, always accompanies her. If the child is absent from her side while in the valley, his mother is never uneasy, for she is aware that

with both Celts and Palatines he is "our boy," and that he can come to no harm with so many to look after him and care for him. He knows every tree, bush, and flower in the valley, and makes pets of every living thing.

Denis Ryan tells a story of how once, when Master Kennedy was a very wee chap indeed, he came upon him and found him kissing and talking to a worm, which he had managed to grub out of the earth with his chubby dimpled fingers. The village urchins run after Bride's sturdy little son and worship him, boy-fashion, for his daring and his spirit. He occasionally thrashes one amongst them, but always selects for the castigation some boy bigger than himself. The only person in Lusmore who looks on the child with anything like disfavour is the stately head nurse at Castle Neville, for the advent of Kennedy is sure to create a certain amount of insubordination in her kingdom, the castle nursery. Rupert Neville, Emily's eldest son and heir, horrified his nurse by coming to her one day with all his fair luxuriant ringlets cut off—the ringlets which hung like spirals of spun gold on to his shoulders, and which it was her daily delight to oil and curl and perfume. Rupert said he "wasn't

going to be a doll any more. That he'd have his hair cropped short, and be a real boy like Kennedy Moore."

But Kennedy's greatest delight was to sit on a three-legged stool in the kitchen of the chapel-house, and, with hands on knees, and eyes and mouth wide open, to listen to all the wonderful things Jane could relate to him. Years had only increased the superstitious fancies of the old servant, but no tale of black cat, or witch, or other horror, was half terrible enough to satisfy the greedy imagination of the boy who hearkened to her.

One summer, Dublin was in such a disturbed state that Bride put off her usual visit to Lusmore, and decided to remain in town until autumn, to see if she could prove of use to any poor person who might get into trouble. One afternoon Gerald and she sallied forth. They found the streets crowded with mounted soldiers, and an exasperated populace who were defying them.

Bride suddenly saw a man throw himself in front of a woman, to save her from being trampled by one of the soldiers' horses which had got

beyond its rider's control. The woman was saved, but her preserver was knocked down and crushed beneath the hoofs of the heavily accoutred charger.

Something about the dark hair and white face struck both Bride and Gerald with a strange familiarity, and they followed in the wake of the victim as he was carried on a stretcher to the hospital. The house surgeon, who knew them, shook his head as they made inquiries about the injured man. Bride, approaching the pallet where the man lay, looked down at him and recognised William Clarke. He was ghastly pale, and his dark eyes had a wild, mournful light in them.

"Oh, my country," he cried, "not to me is granted the boon of seeing thee free, but with my——"

Gerald drew Bride gently away, and as they left the hospital her eyes were full of tears. While they passed through a couple of streets he did not disturb her in her silent sorrow, but at length growing impatient he made an effort to turn her mind to lighter subjects. At last he said earnestly ;

"Dear love, let us look forward and not backward. Think of our boy."

In an instant Bride put her sad thoughts from her, and smiling up at her husband, replied :

“You are right, dearest. As long as I have you and the boy I am the happiest woman in the world.”

Then as she gazed carelessly along the street, she saw her child running towards them from the other end.

Her heart throbbed nervously as he reached her side and grasped her skirts to prevent his falling.

“Mother,” said the boy.

“Oh, my dear,” she exclaimed, in an alarmed tone, “what brought you here? Where is Sally, and how did you get here through the soldiers?”

“Oh, I’m not afraid of soldiers. Sally is all right,” he added, with a saucy laugh, “she’s safe enough.”

Then he danced round his mother, whistling, and jumping, and taking note of everything. Bride’s glance followed the boy with a love that was almost adoration.

“Who knows,” she said, uttering her thought aloud, “but our boy may one day pick up the

broken threads of Uncle John's life and be the saviour of his country?"

"What a foolish, fond mother you are, Bride," said Gerald laughing. Then giving a sly side look at her, he added, "I can't see any difference between him and a hundred other children."

She flushed up directly, and said :

"He is not like any other boy. Our Kennedy will be a leader of men."

At this moment Sall-o'-the-Wig put in an appearance from round a corner and made a dart at the boy, who laughingly dodged behind his mother.

"Oh, ye limb av mischief," cried Sall. "Ye'll lock me up in the pantry again, will ye? Arrah, Miss Bride, I mane Missus Moore, he's a'most bruk me heart lookin' fur him."

"Oh, fie! Kennedy, you must not tease Sally. She has been very good to you."

The saucy little rascal's eyes twinkled, and he pursed up his small mouth as if to express his doubts of Sall-o'-the-Wig's kindness and goodness.

"Has anyone called?" asked Bride.

Sall's face brightened at this question.

"Shure an' Misther O'Brady, the darlint, is cum, an' he's just gone off to the printin' offis to write somethin' fur the paper."

Gerald looked startled at this. He had sent word to the foreman to go to press and not wait for his return, and now there was no knowing what trouble O'Brady might get him into.

"Bride, I must leave you," said Gerald. "O'Brady may be up to some mischief if I am not on the spot."

Then he hailed a passing jaunting-car and drove off.

"Mother, I'll take care of you," said Kennedy, drawing himself to his small height and walking beside her. But hearing a laugh behind him, he turned and saw Sall making faces at him.

"Cry-a-babby. Suck-a-thumb," she called in derision. "Stick to yer mammy's apurn strings."

"Cry-a-babby yourself," shouted the boy, as he rushed back and squared himself up in front of her and doubled his fists. "Now, come on."

Encounters between these two were of every-

day occurrence. The little fellow fought hard and fiercely ; but superior craft and muscle conquered, and after a short, sharp struggle the future saviour of his race was ignominiously led home by the ear by Sall-o'-the-Wig.

THE END.

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